

yourself. You may sense the presence of God when you recall your baptism, or at prayer, or in hearing the word of God. But few moments in life reach you as directly as does this weekly opportunity at the Lord's Supper.

What are you thinking as you receive the bread and wine, or when you return to your chair and listen to the choir and the organ, or, sometimes better, when you enjoy the silence broken only by the footfall of the communing people and the word "for you" spoken to each? What are you thinking as you join in the brief hymn to the LAMB OF GOD who "takes away the sin of the world"?

The act of communing takes but seconds, and participating in a congregational COMMUNION only a few minutes. Today, as so often before, you resolved to use the time to good advantage. Will you have done so? Admit it, some days your resolve goes as quickly as it came. You were going to concentrate on the "for you . . . for forgiveness." Instead your mind wandered, and you cannot later recall anything at all of what passed through it. Not a trace of ecstasy went with this personal moment in the meal. You were in the presence of God and, had it not been for the slight nervousness you felt going up to the front of an assembly, you might have stifled a yawn. You let some passing thing distract you. A scuff on the shoe of the minister. The smell of nicotine on a ministerial hand. The choir singing a bit flat, a jar to your musical sensibilities. A candle dripping on the new church carpet. Had you remembered to have that spot removed from the back of your coat? What will people think? Who donated those altar flowers? Will I get a raise this week?

Here you are, back in your seat. Should you feel guilty about having let the moment pass? Isn't it just human nature to have a wandering mind? You really don't believe the people who claim they can clear their heads and have pure and constant contact with God. There must be a lot of hypocrites here. Why did so little happen?

4. Reflections during Communion

The minutes of reflection during Communion do not allow time for developing a well-rounded theology. Indeed, they hardly suffice for sustaining a simple sequence of serious thought. But one can use this time, with or without some hymns or prayers, to place a few little mental levers on a few spiritual fulcrums, in order to lift them at other times, in other places. One might reflect, for example, on the feelings experienced, the forgiveness received, the presence promised, or the commitment entailed.

Experience

What am I supposed to feel? Am I *supposed* to feel? The whole idea of receiving forgiveness of sins implies recognizing how far you are from God and in how much need you stand. But what if you do not *feel* guilty or agonized?

You have to admit that different personality types will react variously. William James talked about "the sick soul" and "the healthy-minded" as psychological models. The sick soul will have no difficulty feeling in need of forgiveness. The trembling of a leaf has made hearts leap in fear from Leviticus to Luther to modern times. The whole universe seems then to be personified. It takes the form of the accusing finger of God. The victim of such sickness may simply be working out some problem left over from a bad childhood. Parents placed too many restrictions on the conscience, and adult life became nothing more than a "Do I dare?" or "Someone is watching!" Such a person hesitates to take bold action, fearing the consequences.

When time for confession comes, such a sick soul is like a junkie let loose in a pharmacy: All the options are there, in dazzling array. If you are a sin-sick soul, as the psalmist was when he made a river of his bed because of tears, you are able to spill out whole catalogs of faults. So you examine the recesses of the heart and there find every kind of ugliness. You have not done anything worse than anyone else, but you feel worse. You know that before God the greatest faults, while they may mess up human relations more than do the sneaky little faults, violate above all the divine image. True, God forgives them as completely as others, but you still feel they demand a heroic assault.

Once upon a time you were taught to load up everything for a bimonthly crusade against sins at Communion. If you were fortunate, your church encouraged private confession. While you could and should always confess your faults against the person you offended, all faults, especially hidden ones, were faults against God. The minister became a representative person who could speak as it were for God. Ministerial words also became symbolic ways of hearing the human race reaffirm you. They personified the congregation. God was gracious, but now the human family was shown to include "gracious others."

If you did not make a private confession, every Communion service included a group opportunity for exposing your sinfulness to God through rite and ceremony. If such confessions stood the risk of turning routine—and you had to admit that the pose of the average congregation suggested that most people were pretty casual about what they were saying and doing—for you, at times at least, they were wonderful instruments for unburdening. You placed your sins on the strong shoulders of Christ, and the minister in the name of God absolved you of, or forgave,

those sins. Somehow you had to work out a logic by which you again brought them to the Lord's Table only minutes later. Since it was "for forgiveness," you were to leave sins there and walk back to the pew refreshed, with a clean slate on which to start piling up a whole new batch of sins.

Seriously, you knew that this script was not how it was supposed to work. Popular piety had things a bit wrong here. When you gathered your thoughts in an adult study class, the accent was different. There you heard a translation of the phrase *simul iustus et peccator*: You are at the same time the just person made just by the act of Christ, and the sinner kept sinful by your humanity and your acts. "At the same time" meant that when God looked at you in Christ, through Christ, because of Christ—which figuratively meant at you in your baptismal robes, identified with Christ, or here at supper with him—God did not see you as a half-safe, half-sinful being. You were not 99 and 44/100% clean and every day in every way getting better and better through positive thinking about the cross. No, God looked at you and saw Christ. Insofar as God made you just through the grace of Christ which you received in faith, you lacked nothing.

"At the same time" also meant that the God who looked at you when you stood apart from Christ saw nothing to like. This God was not impressed by your claim to have met the Lord. A bumper sticker asserting that you were born again or had received the Holy Spirit meant no more spiritually than do the annual rival claims that Notre Dame or Texas or Nebraska are number one in football. In fact, your greatest temptation—not to need God—occurred precisely in your spiritual life. Especially in our time, when *Psychology Today*, Eastern religions, and scores of Christian movements peddle techniques for meditating, you are tempted to buy into one of these mechanisms and put a claim upon God. When competitive Christian



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television programs teach you how to praise God better than others, and be more pious than others, there is a danger that you will use your praise and piety to bind God, to take away the freedom of God. You will be saying, "Notice me, Lord!" All the while you are therefore not relying in faith on the gift of Jesus Christ. You are busy parading virtues, and God is saying, "Forget it! Your virtues at their best are not good enough."

The fact that you feel the need to do such parading suggests that you are a sick soul and need a remedy. You have come, then, to the right place. There is no magical transaction called confession/absolution, or confession/Lord's Supper. But in this meal you receive the gifts of Jesus Christ. You did not earn them and you did not earn a place at this banquet, but by baptism you are identified and united with Christ. As in baptism you symbolically came out from under the water, gasping for life because you had been "dead," so literally—in the Christian scheme—you did already die, and rose, with Christ. When you go to the Lord's Supper, then, as you kneel you are not bringing your adding-machine totals of the sins you want forgiven. You are bringing your whole self in need, and with the loaf and the cup you are receiving the forgiveness that assures you that your whole self is full of well-being.

You know, then, what you are supposed to feel.

William James also spoke of the religion of "the healthy-minded." He thought it was especially attractive to those who joined the Christian Science movement, liberal Protestantism, or something that was then called New Thought. Such people believed that there was an essential harmony to the universe, that all they had to do was tap into it. Mortal mind or negative thinking might interrupt the flow, but a person could realize a return to the original harmony. Such a system of faith is at odds

with the Christian drama that proclaims a disruption of that harmony. Humans created and create discord and chaos. They do not hear the purity of the angels on the morning of creation. They do not stir to the trumpets of the messengers of God. They toot their own horns and sing their own praises. Well-being is not a part of a flow. It is a divine gift that interrupts all our natural ways of expecting wholeness.

While healthy-mindedness as a system is beyond the scope of this Lord's Supper, the healthy-minded psychological style is present among Christians. The Bible and Christian history display characters who did not make a river of their beds with tears. Martin Luther may have felt threatened by a thousand devils and by a judging God who was too near, but in your healthy-mindedness you do not. You see no point in pretending. You find nothing especially attractive or Christian in those otherwise blithe people who think they please God by bowing lowest, kneeling longest, and groveling most visibly: "Look, God, I really got good at confessing!"

The healthy-minded or blithe Christian type is a personality that, fully aware of the fallenness of creation, grasps its beauty instead. After the resurrection of Christ, the first signs of a new order, a new creation, are here for affirming. This kind of Christian takes bits of sand and dye, fuses them, and produces stained glass through which you see the sun break on the sanctuary floor with a foretaste of heavenly sparkles. The New Creation Christian takes the disordered sounds of diesel engines, clanging pots, and scuffling feet and reorders them into scales and tones until you hear overtones of the music of the spheres. This Christian walks the hospital corridors aware of death but sings quiet songs because God is also at work healing. Healthy-mindedness is not positive thinking apart from God but a psychological and spiritual bearing

that finds God to be not the Judge but the One who intended and intends concord.

The blithe type lives with spiritual hazards that are as great as those brought by the grovelers. If you find yourself toward the healthy-minded part of the spectrum, you may use the Lord's Supper as a time to become especially alert to these dangers. The silences for self-examination are excellent opportunities for this. You might be riding for a fall. That is, you may be sunny about your faith because you have not yet been tested. No cloud has yet shadowed you. Wait until you find that your child is suffering from a debilitating disease. Let an economic disaster wipe out your assets. Some day someone important to you will find great fault with you and announce a breach. For all the smiles in the world, you cannot backslap your way into a new relation. Then some of the illusions with which you lived will drop.

Healthy-mindedness may imply a faulty spiritual diagnosis. You have heard the familiar statements of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace: "I like to commit sins. God likes to forgive them. The world is admirably arranged." Or "I can sin; that's my business. God will forgive; that's the business God is in. We will keep each other busy." These are flippant translations of attitudes that color many easy lives. None of them measures the cost to God of the cross or the cost to humans of discipleship. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it becomes nothing. But if it dies, it brings forth fruit. No one follows Jesus without taking up a cross and denying the self. Jesus knew what was in humans and searchingly stripped the disciples themselves of their claims upon God—because Jesus loved his disciples and did not want them to rule God out of their lives by their casualness.

In order to be sure that healthy-minded psychological types come to spiritual depth, the preacher in every sermon

will proclaim the law of God. In some contexts, the law of God is God's power that enables one to see what it is that care of the neighbor establishes. But in the present context, the law of God does nothing but accuse. You thought you were doing all right because you did not kill? Jesus says that if you hate, you are a murderer. You thought you were pretty healthy because you stayed married and faithful to one partner and never committed adultery? You all have committed adultery when you merely looked, or even thought, lustfully. Martin Luther liked to say that if you did not feel sinful you should reach inside your clothes and pinch yourself to see if you are still flesh and blood.

What are you supposed to feel? In some epochs and some congregations, preachers and counselors have to cool people off. Don't feel so much, they say; you are so busy enjoying your miseries that you do not even recognize that there is a Physician and that he has cured. But you, if you are healthy-minded, live in a different kind of age and place. Most sermons urge you to probe yourself more deeply. But you can build a wall against God if you start making the relation with God the basis of your own self-esteem; that will not work. The preacher's admonition to self-examination need not force you to change your personality type or your outlook on the New Creation. It only asks you to be serious. You are to see things not through illusion but as they are. The Christian faith calls you to realism about the disharmonious universe in which babies die, the innocent die, and you will die. There is a fundamental lack of fit in the way the world is now put together apart from Christ, and its misfit character will not go away this side of eternity, despite the victory of Christ.

What are you, then, supposed to feel? If not sniveling, woebegone, sub-Christian blues, you are to acquire awareness. You who are called "miserable sinners" may not feel miserable. But—to update an old illustration

from the era of trains—like occupants of an aircraft in which a time bomb is set in the baggage compartment, though you feel fine about your martini and your magazine, you *are* miserable. You are part of the misfit situation. You need rescue. You need help. At the Lord's Table it is not necessary for you to conjure up all kinds of *emotions*; you simply need to be *aware* of need and to realize the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness

Some weeks at the Lord's Supper you might wish to set your lever for reflection under another great burden: the concept of forgiveness. That this forgiveness of sins is "for you" is now clear by everything in the event, but what *is* forgiveness? Do we exaggerate its importance?

Jesus made much of it when he chose to forgive a person in need of physical healing, even though that meant offending the religious leaders. Give those leaders credit. They asked, with a proper sense of regard for holy things, "Who can forgive sins but God?" They were not likely to cheapen forgiveness. Paul busied himself with writing letters telling people how the forgiven should learn to live together as Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. But along the way he spent many energies detailing what forgiveness meant for him and his readers. Through Christian history Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and a large company of others saw forgiveness as a central image for the basic movement of a loving God to mortals.

So it is that in the late twentieth century we have inherited something we can call "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins." Whole church bodies claim it as their possession. It is their badge and banner. With it they make their claim, "We're number one!" They use it to show what all the second bests look like, because the others own

lesser chunks of the doctrine or because they have it all wrong. In the nineteenth century, Americans paraded their Monroe Doctrine. One night a man was tarred and feathered and run out of town. A stranger came upon the miserable victim and asked him what had happened. It seems that there had been a loyalty test and a dispute about this aspect of foreign policy. What had the tarred man said or done wrong? He answered, "I didn't say I don't love the Monroe Doctrine. I do love the Monroe Doctrine. I live by the Monroe Doctrine. I would die for the Monroe Doctrine. I simply said I don't know what it is." We wonder whether the people with the tar pots and baskets of feathers knew.

You are at the Lord's Table, assured that the forgiveness of sins comes "for you." It is easy to think, "I belong to the right club. I can show God the right credentials. I am loyal to my tribe. I love the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I live by the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I would die for the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. But I simply do not know what it is." If so, you have difficulty reflecting on it at Holy Communion. You wish to do better.

First of all, remember that a doctrine does not save. God saves. You need not even call it a doctrine, especially in times when many people use that word to suggest that the life has already gone out of a reality. In their minds—and why play into their problems?—a doctrine is a gravestone you place over the bones of something that once lived. It is a boundary you place around something your ancestors found important. A doctrine or a dogma is an attempt by humans to define the indefinable, to step across the boundaries of mystery and speak overconfidently about the secrets of God. In a time when people do not know who they are, they use the idea of a doctrine to set boundaries. In that case, a doctrine is not a witness to their

love of truth but a mark of their sense of mutual suspicion. Since you cannot trust anyone, you have to ask whether they line up on the wrong or right side of a precisely defined doctrine. The fact that doctrines and dogmas have other, better uses is not of much help here. Let other people on other days rescue the concept of doctrine. You are a hungry person needing food, not recipe books. You seek the forgiveness of sins at the Lord's Supper.

Second, since in church you have time for clarity but not research, you might want some day to study the way the forgiveness of sins may be an obsolete badge of distinction for a church body or two. The Spirit of God works surprises these days, and the spread of divine grace is sufficiently broad that what once looked like a unique property or witness of an evangelical church now turns up on many hands. Four centuries ago, reformers of the church looked around and honestly did see some Christians turning God's gift of forgiveness into a human transaction. People were using their energies to impress God. The faithful bought or visited relics, went on pilgrimages, pursued processions, paid for masses, purchased indulgences, and did what they could to buy the favorable attention of God. They were just as often busy piling up merits to impress God, so that God dared not act unfavorably to people who were owed so much for having helped keep the universe on track. No matter how ecumenical one's spirit, those pages of history cannot be obscured. Roman Catholics, heirs of that unreformed Christianity, today point this out in very public scholarship.

Unreformed Christianity underwent reform. You will hear some people who feel called to draw boundaries for God saying that wrong teachings about forgiveness are still on those other churches' books. Maybe it would be nice if church bodies did feel obliged to retrace their steps to all

the old libraries and councils, call new councils, and bring out their erasers. But churches do not work that way. They write with far more vivid new inks over fading pages. Today it is more valuable to listen to evangelical Catholic sermons, where the message of the forgiveness of sins comes through loud and clear. *The Jerusalem Bible*, which Catholic scholars and publishers would like to see in every home, is a highly public document. Its footnoted versions stress the free gifts of the forgiveness of sins in every crucial passage. This is disappointing to some leftover anti-Catholics. What fun is the Lord's Supper, if there are fewer people to be anti- as we enjoy it? But a Christian spirit also impels you to express joy for the spread of grace. This realization, plus common agreement over the meaning of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, has built a sense of holy but not yet constant frustration among many Roman and other catholic Christians. Why do we stay apart at the Lord's Table? Who are we to build fences where the Host does not?

A third focus for reflection is this: You do not need the words *forgiveness of sins* to express the new relationship you have to God in Christ. In some ways, these words can be code words, a metaphor through which Christians can connect with many biblical themes. Through most of the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures that you call the Old Testament, repentance and forgiveness are not the prime statements. Yet the Old Testament is the church's book. God was active among his people. This God was a loving, caring, and, yes, forgiving agent. The Hebrew Scriptures busied themselves with talking about how God was shaping a people and covenanting with them out of steadfast love.

In the Gospels, Jesus is the bearer of forgiveness, but forgiveness is not the only word on his lips. Jesus calls for obedience. He asks for discipleship. Because, for many,

forgiveness symbolizes the basic trajectory of God's movement to humans, they expect to hear about nothing else. Yet Jesus does what the situation demands. When someone is ill, Jesus *may* be abrupt: "Your sins are forgiven!" But just as often he may simply heal the physical illness, and we do not hear about outcomes having to do with forgiveness. His Good Samaritan is someone who pours on oil and wine and foots the bill for the clinic, without—so far as we know—passing out tracts or preaching sermons on forgiveness.

Paul, who had persecuted the church, found it easy to feel agony over guilt. He was tortured by his need for forgiveness. So he became a proclaimer *par excellence* of that teaching. But, as we already noted, he spent as much time telling the forgiven how to live together, or to have holy lives, as to be forgiven. So you too do not need to have a specific code word or formula in mind when you want to realize the gift of the Lord's Supper.

When your church wrote its older books of worship and teaching, debate over forgiveness was prime. Martin Luther was of the sick-souled type, who projected his struggles from the monastery onto the movement that followed him. In the modern play *Luther* John Osborne has Luther railing against the empty heavens, as if God were remote: "God is dead." The real Luther had the opposite problem. For him the heavens were full and close, and God was too near, too threatening. A holy God might annihilate an unholy human. Divine perfection could not coexist with human imperfections. The monk tried every rule and every discipline, but still each trembling leaf caused him to cower. When, in the writings of Paul, Luther discovered the forgiveness of sins, the monk naturally chose to use it as the basic image of the loving divine movement.

Today, it is often noted, many people have a different problem. They are there with John Osborne's fictional

Luther. Their God is remote. Where Luther asked, "Is God gracious?" they ask, "Is God?" Their doubts may not lead them to verge on simple atheism. Such Christians put their problem in different ways. They will complain about the lack of meaning in their lives. Where once the simplest peasants could endure every kind of setback because God would reward them in heaven, now eternal life has become a very vague concept for them. While once God seemed to be pronouncing a perpetual benediction on their towns, so that all knew their places, now urban life seems plotless. Typical words that people use—perhaps you use—to describe the modern condition in which most of us share are alienation, brokenness, meaninglessness. We seek reconciliation, wholeness, meaning.

Say words like reconciliation, wholeness, and meaning, and you come very close to the center of Christian witness. Jesus Christ reconciles God to humans, and humans to each other. Wholeness virtually serves as a synonym for salvation, for well-being under God. Jesus Christ the risen one brings meaning because he is the first sign of the New Creation, the new order of being. It is hard to see why anyone should feel guilty about using words like these to express the experience of grace in the Lord's Supper. Christ the physician offers the gift of a cure for what ails us. If he and we have varying names for the disease—and thus, in a way, subtly different diseases—we shall welcome marvelously varied remedies. Forgiveness of sins, then, is a blanket term for the whole relationship that Jesus effects and which is "for you" in the Lord's Supper when grasped by faith.

While writing these pages, I had occasion to consult Edmund Schlink's *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* to see what he and they had to say on this subject. Under "Forgiveness" the index said, "see Gospel; Justification; Lord's Supper; Word of God." Under three of those four categories "forgiveness" did not appear at all; the book

treats it as a synonym for gospel and justification! Under "Word of God," there are seven brief references to the subcategory "of forgiveness." One of these citations does suggest synonymy: "forgiveness of sins is the same as justification" in the confessional writings. And Schlink develops a thesis: "The Gospel is the word of forgiveness through which God justifies the sinner for Christ's sake"; indeed, the Gospel, say the confessions, is "the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ."

When we introduce the "-ation" words like "justification," it is easy to clutter and confuse the mind of a modern person who wants to experience forgiveness, to realize wholeness, in the event of the Lord's Supper. How are you to think of what the code words suggest? Most important is the idea that you do not bring something with which to impress God. God shatters whatever is in your hand. The law of God accuses and annihilates you. Then God, acting through and because of Christ, creates a new you, a baptized person-in-Christ. That is what it means to be a forgiven person, to experience an act or a motion of divine forgiveness.

You can now see why this forgiveness is the core of Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ on the cross. The cross was for you, and so is the Supper. In the meal the cross is a present-day reality. The risen and ascended Christ is present in this form and at this event. Just as preaching, received in faith, is not mere talk about forgiveness but actually works forgiveness, so the Lord's Supper, received in faith, is not a pageant displaying the story of a forgiving God. It is God in action, effecting forgiveness, creating the new. The Large Catechism uses vivid language about the Lord's Supper not as a prescription but a remedy: "For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his

gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils." Maybe you had not quite counted on having to take on "the devil and all devils," but this remedy is designed to help you do just that. And there may be a better way of conceiving what is wrong than the way of superficial diagnoses about personality types, symptoms of imbalance, Oedipal complexes, or maladjustment to the modern condition. The Lord's Supper is "the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new person." It is "a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also." Here is another bonus, and you do not have to join a therapeutic club in the church to share the benefit.

Forgiveness means liberation. Classically, this liberation refers to freedom from sin, death, and the devil. But it is possible to hear of this only in the context of middle-class America and not to envision all the other settings in which Christians look for liberation. In the concentration camps the Lord's Supper meant forgiveness of sins, but it also depicted a zone of human freedom into which believers hoped God would lead them again. Under governments that repress the faith, communicants cannot help but include their prayers and hopes for escape from such bondage. Late in the twentieth century in Latin America and elsewhere in what is called the Third World, Christians hungry for political and economic freedom have developed a "liberation theology." In its terms, worshipers want the Lord's Supper to be freed from the cozy bindings in which the rich celebrate it.

To the liberation theologian, many biblical motifs have come to be neglected by churches in prosperous nations. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord of Israel is especially active among the poor and overrun. Jesus Christ clearly announces that he has also come to the oppressed and wants to work for change in their life. In that thrust,

the death of Jesus and the Lord's Supper are gifts to the poor and oppressed, who, it is said, feel less the weight of sin than they do the bondage produced by humans who exploit them. Such reasoning is understandable among people who know little freedom and have nothing earthly to look forward to under their present regimes. Secure and well-off Christians do well not to judge these brothers and sisters but to understand them when they tie together their dreams of political freedom on the one hand with their grasp of grace and liberation from sin on the other. The two are not the same thing, but freedom is contagious, and acts of imagination can help Christians everywhere share one another's aspirations and hopes that God will act.

Obsession with the code term *forgiveness of sins* has sometimes led partisans to narrow the meanings of the Lord's Table. They feel it wrong to connect eucharist or thanksgiving with the Supper because it may detract from the main theme. Yet the Great Thanksgiving is wholly preoccupied with being thankful to the loving God who not only created the world but also establishes in it a new relation with you. Others see forgiveness as in competition with the idea of communion, which some churches make central. But this is also unnecessarily cramping. Another of the Lutheran confessions connects the two: The same Lord's Supper that forgives is also "a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another." We are, through this gift, "incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the church." Because we and others share unmerited forgiveness, we are on the same level at the Lord's Table. We have to be very careful about placing different levels where God does not, and about ruling people away whom Christ includes at his Supper.

Presence

What do we mean by the presence of Christ in this Supper?

I almost wish you had not brought this up. Perhaps if one could compute all the serious reflections that people bring to the Table, this issue of the presence would rank third. Whoever studies the history of dispute over the sacrament or listens to present-day theological debate might conclude that it is the number one issue. Why? It provides grist for intellectual debate and becomes a kind of test for people who like to sharpen their philosophical tools on things sacred. Being a historian of Christianity, I find it hard to look at the record without adding that if there is any feature of the Lord's Supper that brings out the meanest growls from partisan Christians, this is it. While the faithful people have the least difficulty with the theme, and while the New Testament offers almost no light, the subject naturally comes up in the mind of anyone who wants to be neat and inclusive in thought about the Lord's Supper.

To begin at the end, most writers on the subject say that the precise mode of Christ's presence is a mystery. Then they define mystery not as you do in a mystery story, where by the end of the book everything is clear—the butler did it; there is a conclusion, and the mystery ends. In a deeper sense mystery means rather that if you pull away one veil, another will still cover the subject; one could pull back veils for all the years that history gives and still not have exposed the subject to clear view. Emphatically, the presence of Christ is such a mystery. There can be honest and creative addresses to mystery, such as people make when they witness to the character of God, and less valid ones, of the sort one reads when people convince themselves they really have proved the existence of God or philosophically explained away the origin and presence of evil.

The special problem with the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper grows from the fact that the Scriptures are so nearly silent about it. This means that the Lord's Supper

is used to fill in many blanks. Other teachings are like barnacles attached to it, and it gets connected to other doctrines. Of course, it links with one's concept of where the risen and exalted Jesus Christ is, and whether Christ can reveal the fullness of God in earthly and finite forms. We leave those filled-in blanks and connected doctrines for other authors in other books for other days. You have the Lord's Supper on your mind.

Bring up the presence of Christ and you enter the zone where intellectuality has made its greatest mark on practice. In some churches, one gets the impression that to escape unworthiness—Paul's term for the unexamined life at the Lord's Supper—one must have a certain IQ. It would seem to be necessary for communicants to be able to mouth a precise number of memorized catechismal formulas. The church might make exception for the people in homes for the retarded, who are allowed to get by on simple affirmations of faith in Jesus Christ and a desire for the Lord's Table. But beyond them, those who merit access to Communion are those who have the prescriptions down cold. The twentieth-century church is trying to learn how to hold together two ideas: the integrity of understanding the Lord's Supper and the need not to impose barriers that the Pauline and Gospel accounts clearly do not erect. At the very least, one can learn not to attribute a mean spirit and bad faith to other Christians who are at least as concerned as you are to be faithful to the documents and the truth but who come off with a different reading.

You will never find an intellectually satisfying formula for the presence. Write that down and remember it as you read all the books, by people on your side and by others. In the end the honest writers all have to lapse back for a second to the language about mystery, where they began. Some of them succeed at representing accurately their own

church's teaching; they deserve awards from historical societies. Others ingeniously connect their personal philosophy to the teaching; they merit rewards from philosophical societies, though it is hard to picture a single philosopher likely to be impressed. My tone here might verge on the satirical and the antiintellectual. I do not intend that, since I, too, respect and even regard as necessary the idea of "loving God with all the mind" and extending this to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. But here is a case where it is necessary to expect only small returns on expensive investments.

The Lord's Supper service has room for some ethereal images like that of the "thrice-holy" that faced Isaiah in the temple. But at the most personal point the sacrament is very physical. Just as God is revealed in the bad grammar of the well-preached word, so now you have to think in rather crass terms about another mode of the presence. The same kind of bread you will eat at home this noon is on this table. The wine here is similar to what you can have at dinner. You pass them through the same mouth. They carry the same germs. One may harden, the other turns sour, like any other bread and wine. People with bad breath and cavities receive them past droopy mustaches or elegantly tinted lips. Keep the crude images in mind, since no other ones will keep to the forefront the offense and the scandal. This food will pass through the body and be digested and excreted through natural processes. Jesus knew all about that when he pointed to bread and said "This—my body!" and when he lifted a cup and gave it with "This—my blood!" (Some scholars think that, where the Greek text uses the much fought-over word *is*, the language Jesus spoke led him simply to designate.)

You move to the Table and are given the gifts with the words "The body of Christ. . . . The blood of Christ," not "the bread of the earth, the wine of the vine." What are

you to think? Christ is somehow present in form as body, not as ghost. Christ is present in the whole church and in this congregation, in the whole event of the Lord's Supper—but also here and now. Christ is not naturally at home in your heart; there is no room for him there. But now more-than-naturally he finds room through your whole body, through faith, which also means because you hear the word promising his coming, and you cling to that promise. The promise means God recognized that in faith you accept the gift of Christ's presence, and God sees you as "one body" with all others who are in Christ, who receive this body and blood. When the minister hands over the bread or the cup, this handing over takes the same trajectory as the whole shape of God's act in Christ: Christ is handed over to evil people and for the sake of life.

One recent pondering, Robert Jensen's *Visible Words*, points to certain problems connected with two main theories about the presence. The first depends on the power of consecration—remember that ministerial sign of the cross above the bread and wine and how you thought *now* they are being changed? This approach set out to show how God, who can do anything, could make two things into one without destroying either. This is not an unintelligent approach, but it is an unnecessary one. The people who made so much of the act of consecrating were not too interested in explaining the presence. They wanted, as you do not, to carve out a role for the priesthood, to give priests a monopoly on something. Nothing worked better for this than to assert the exclusive right of the priest to a consecrating act that made two things one and yet kept them two things. Today Roman Catholicism has moved far from this concept, though it is still busy redefining evangelical priesthood.

Another way to explain the presence is to use spiritual language in order to remove distance. Yes, it says, by faith

we can see that Jesus overleaps distance and is "at the right hand of the Father." Since distances mean nothing in the spiritual realm, that right-hand position extends here to the altar where the bread and wine are. But this approach makes Christ's presence conditional on your ability to imagine him being far and near; the presence is not straightforwardly here. This understanding also seems to shrink from the idea that the divine or the human can ever be embodied. Christians cannot leap out of their bodies to be spiritually with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

A third approach is more radical than these. The body of the risen Christ is not separated from any reality. Christ has risen in the body to be where God is. God is everywhere. If the risen Christ is, according to promise, embodied where this bread and this cup are, the only miracle you need to believe in is Christ's own resurrection. God is present wherever the promises of God are in effect. These promises are embodied. God has a body where these promises connect to the man Christ Jesus, or to this event called the Lord's Supper and the bread and the cup that are at its heart.

This bread and wine are, in the eyes of God, the presence of the man Jesus. No other body and blood of Christ are to be found by means of better telescopes in farther ranges of distance above the clouds. The risen Jesus is risen to new spiritual and bodily life, so we can now be audacious about the promises and say that the bread and the cup *are* the body. But this is true only for faith. The presence is hidden. The bread does not look like his body, and it did not do so when first he made the designation and offered the promise about his embodiment in the meal. There is more to Christ than this local and temporal presence. This "more" has to do with Christ's future when the word will be preached and when the bread and wine will be enjoyed again in this event. That is why after the service today the

ministers—or anyone—can consume the leftover wine and bread. Forget about the elements then. If their power as Christ's body depended upon consecration, you would have to be deconsecrate them or save them for ongoing power. The choice you make shows how you regard this event.

Within our generation it is not likely that all Christians will come to agree on this or on any other version of the presence. Remember my first words in this connection: These efforts could do no more than draw away some veils while leaving others to surround the mystery.

Commitment

You may find it valuable to reflect on still one other feature of the Lord's Supper. What does this event have to do with my way of life?

By concentrating on what passes through your mind during the liturgy, we have sounded rather churchly and even churchy. These reflections might have the smell of incense and the glow of candles about them, and thus they lose contact with the surrounding world. Yet you may spend all but a couple of your 168 weekly hours outside the sanctuary. Debates about catechisms and dogma will almost never come up there. The test of this Lord's Supper and its workings will be in the lives of communicants.

In the oldest words we have about this meal, in First Corinthians, Paul concerned himself with connecting Communion practices with the lives of the participants. Many of them lived in open scandal. That had to stop. Others made a noisy orgy out of the eucharist itself. Paul drew the congregation up short with questions: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). That word *participation* is an urgent link between the

liturgy and Jesus Christ and then between Jesus Christ and all the rest of life. An exchange is going on here; in fact, behind the Greek word translated "participation" stands the word *exchange*. In a sense, Jesus Christ, the son of God and divine Savior, exchanges roles when he takes on flesh, humbles himself, gives himself in this bread and wine, and suffers death. And for that reason you undergo an exchange and get to share in the divine gifts and life.

No one should walk away from the Lord's Supper unchanged. It is good to use the visibility of Communion and its bodily actions as an occasional means to reflect on personal commitment. You may have heard some experts advise that congregations be kept busy singing hymns during Communion so that they will not accidentally glance up and see who else is at the Lord's Table. A good-looking person of one sex may distract an observer of the other. The sight of someone you cannot stand could disturb you. (In which case, why were you not reconciled before this hour? Seeing the person is a reminder of ongoing work for you!) We could turn this around: Seeing and being seen is a very useful exercise, since bodily movement to the Table is an announcement of intentions. Not "Look at me, folks, how pious I am for being here!" The day when attending church gave you status is long past. Instead "Look at me, folks, as I look at you. We are sinners, but we are participants in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We get to see what prophets and kings wanted to see but could not. We are part of the New Creation. Our bodies are on the line. We are committed."

A congregation is a gathering of people who bear one another's burdens. They are people who can support one another in illness and weakness, encourage one another when a task is heavy, speak a word of serious concern when they detect a lapse, and rejoice together in victories. Bodily presence at the Lord's Supper is not to be shunned

but celebrated. Jesus Christ is here in a bodily presence with the bread. Why should you lower your eyes? Jesus Christ is here also as a bodily presence in you and your fellow members, who are to be Christs to each other. You should not lower your eyes. Look up.

And as you look up, you see that the last communicants are leaving the Table. One or another of these reflections took control of your mind. You have to scoop up a hymnal, a worship folder, and some leftover thoughts, since the service will come rather abruptly to its end.

5. "In the Morning . . ."

The Communion being ended, and your reflections too, the ministers clear the table and replace the cup and plate while you join in singing the CANTICLE, a short hymn of thanks. The minister offers a PRAYER, pronounces a BLESSING on you and all the people, and says, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." (This used to be: "*Ita missa est*"—"the mass is ended; go in peace." Hence the term *mass*.) So you go in peace. You glance at your watch, wondering whether the service was over-long, given the rather large communing congregation today. A secular thought crowds in. Has the roast burned? I've got to catch Harry and Marge to see about our get-together on Friday. Will that weak battery start the motor? Such thoughts were not completely out of mind during the service. They are with you yet. But God is present among people whose minds wander, whose attentions stray, whose staying-power is short. He is present in a sanctuary that never quite leaves behind its world. God is also present in a world that should become a sanctuary. His peace goes with you into that world.

You greet the ministers at the door, as you did back when they passed the peace of Christ, you chat with some friends, the car does start, the roast is only slightly burned, and most of the day is still ahead of you. By evening you will have passed through some of the usual cycles of boredom, drift, anger, and frustration. You hollered at the children. You grumbled about having to go to work tomorrow. You bet wrong on that choice of an evening

scholarly talk about the function of rites and meals, and reflections on congregating, however, are not the chief thing. Only belief in the "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins," accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, is vital. Philosopher William James once urged readers to seek the "commanding vision" of an author so that everything else will fall into place. "For you . . . for forgiveness" is the commanding vision in this understanding of the Lord's Supper; everything else follows from it. Lose sight of it and the meal will become merely a nice rite. Einar Billing, a Swedish Christian leader, has suggested that we picture a system of Christian thought not as a collection of doctrines set like pearls on a string but as a glowing core, with everything else taking light and warmth from the center, like the rays from the sun. The glowing core of this meal is "for you . . . for forgiveness," and all the other rays emerge from it.

3. The Service

The ministers enter. They may be following a cross, which now is a sign above the bodies of the whole baptized congregation. Those who follow it signal their awareness that they have been reborn today. This cross represents the call to discipleship, to the fellowship of Christ's suffering. There may be some candle-lighting and movement by a choir. If there is a procession, it exists chiefly to help you separate your thinking from those reveries that went before and the distractions of a gray or jarringly busy world around you. The movement states that something special is going on here. But do not be fooled. That cross may be made of gold, but it should shock you as much as if they were wheeling into position an electric chair, a gallows, or a guillotine. Those candles may create glistening auras and halos; you remember how as a child you half shut your eyes and almost saw angelic light around them. But candles also pierced the darkness for ancient congregants back when the Christians worshiped in catacombs, or in your century when they needed a flaming wick to provide meager light over smuggled bread and wine in a concentration camp. Christians have often gathered for this meal in secret rooms, behind closed doors where a procession with trumpets would only have attracted the notice of the authorities. If these features underscore the "for you . . . for forgiveness," well and good; let them all be splendid. The week ahead will be drab enough.

Next everyone sings a hymn, perhaps a psalm. Adults may not join voices again all week, unless perhaps to

mumble their way through the national anthem at an athletic event. But this singing is different; that is clear from the very outset. The words of the ENTRANCE HYMN* itself reinforce the idea that what follows is to involve you in the blessing and praise of God. These lines then tell you about you more than do many mawkish spiritual songs which give God a full report on your passing emotions. "THE GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . be with you"—the "president" or minister up front speaks the greeting and you respond. The brief exchange between pastor and people is a serious conversation which implies a true partnership.

With Christians of all ages you soon find yourself praying the KYRIE prayers for the peace from above; clearly that peace is "for you." Then you ask for the peace of the world and the well-being of the church, though you may wince to think how little well-being and unity you have ever seen in the churches you have known. Lord have mercy! You find yourself joining in a song that takes its first measures from the angelic announcement on the night of Jesus's birth, "GLORY TO GOD in the highest, and peace to his people on earth." These words also lift far above the reportorial earthbound hymns, and they too tell you about you because they give glory to the God who sustains you. You may instead find yourself singing words that take off from the event of Easter, "the feast of victory for our God." These words remember the Lamb whose "blood set us free to be people of God." A congregation cannot get much closer in song to the commanding vision of "for you . . . for forgiveness." Nothing has happened yet this morning to cloud that vision with its glowing core. Even the PRAYER OF THE DAY spoken on this particular Sunday

*The capitalized words identify features of the liturgy in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Other evangelically catholic orders of service will be very similar.

maintains the focus. And you pray too, making the leader's words your own.

Then, whether in Eastern Europe or in North America, among the rich or the poor, the reverent or the distracted, on a Sunday morning in the late twentieth century you find yourself listening to three readings from scriptures that are two or three thousand years old. Because you hear LESSONS like these every week, you find it hard to understand how peculiar, even how shocking, this simple part of the Lord's Supper is. The church which provided the readings, the readers, and the listeners seems to assume that these stories, too, are "for you."

How can words "do" something? That they are indeed supposed to do something is suggested by the next line of the catechism paragraph we began quoting above (about the benefit "for you"): "By these words the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation." Not all the words in the ancient lessons we hear every week directly offer forgiveness. Some of them thunder the judgment of God and accuse the congregation; others are stories depicting forgiveness. But when they come to their overall point, they signal the activity of a God who works "for you," to make you new and acceptable. Words *do* this. For the congregation such words are not mere words; they become instruments, tools, agents.

The strangeness of this practice of reading from Scripture still haunts you. The words do not come from ancient Greek or Roman histories. The congregation is not a Shakespeare society that meets to dissect the playwright's terms and phrases, nor is it a Robert Burns Memorial Society that gathers to recall a poet. Neither is the congregation a collection of keepers of the city of the dead, people who come to hear about the way their club is a

custodian of burial plots, including one of a dead Christ. Rather these are stories from the people of Israel and the new people of God. They are told "for you," and thenceforth they become your story.

That a story can save, as can a meal, is remarkable, but we know very little about how and why stories save. As you did with the meal, ask what part stories play in ordinary life. When someone becomes important to you, you begin to tell each other the story of your life. To share with someone the story of your day makes you part of each other's ways. If you invest in a firm, you need to hear a narrative of the company's performance, even if this be in the lowly form of a comparative financial statement. In elementary school, children hear the story of their country; elders hope that it will attract the loyalty of a new generation. In a tribe, the young ones hear the myths that bind the people together. Not all these various kinds of stories can be stories "for you," but the biblical record is "for you." Because its commanding vision is the movement of God toward a historic people, not all its parts have to fit neatly together. The story unfolds among unlikely people in a world far away. Yet the believer does not stand *outside* the story. The Bible has a plot, and you are *in* it. At Holy Communion these ancient readings serve to help develop that plot and draw together the people in it. Those who hear will therefore have more in common at the subsequent meal. Without the story, they will forget, and that will make them less human. The story describes the action of God. It works faith. It heals. The Lord's Supper will make the words visible.

While you may have heard a number of different readers, some of whom were from the congregation, you now turn your attention to a minister who stands behind a book, reads from it, and, if you are fortunate, declares its truth "for you." If you are unfortunate, you will get a

book review, a comment on world affairs, some how-to advice for personal success, or some doctrinal comment about the word. A good homily or SERMON relentlessly plumbs a text and lets its depths reach you. It speaks to the baptized people of God, God's new people, or invites those present to join the baptized. Such a sermon points to the forthcoming meal. After a bad sermon the meal has to do the work all on its own.

In the Lord's Supper, the act of preaching adds to the general sense of strangeness. The preacher may use bad grammar and have some mannerisms that make you wish you had stayed in the back pew. Preachers themselves sometimes embody even bad ways of life, about which you know just enough to let yourself be distracted from what is being said. Some preachers' opinions may be shaky and their proclamations wrong. Preachers are fallible, but this meal is also for them and for their forgiveness, including forgiveness for sins they may demonstrate in the very act of preaching. And yet we call what they are doing "preaching the word of God." Insofar as they stick to the story of the mighty deeds of God, the love of God in Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work in presenting the story through the Scriptures, this is divine word.

For Martin Luther, the church is not a "feather house" for quill pens, like a secretarial office or a library; it is a "mouth house." The word is not so much *geschrieben* ("written") as it is *geschrien* ("shouted"). In preaching, when the spoken word comes to the assembled congregation, something really happens—it does not *not* happen—God is present. Someone asks, "Have you met the Lord today?" "Yes," you say, "in the stumbling words of a laborious preacher." "Are you born again?" "Yes," you reply, "in response to this word that works faith in me, leading me to leave behind 'the old self.'"

The words of the Scripture readings and the sermon are great spellings-out of the very few words in the four narratives through which the Bible details the first Lord's Supper. We think of them as part of the response to a catechism question, "How can bodily eating and drinking produce such great effects?"

Be archaic for a moment and listen to the old-fashioned but startling answer: "The eating and drinking do not in themselves produce the effects, but the words 'for you' and 'for the forgiveness of sins.' *These words*, when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament, and he who believes *these words* has what they say and declare: the forgiveness of sins." Here are perfectly blended and held together the two basic features of the Christian sacrament—words and elements, both received in faith. To talk about which is prime or prior is idle at this point. Debating about whether the pulpit for preaching or the table for the Supper should have architectural dominance is futile. At the Lord's Supper they are put together, and no human should put them asunder. The HYMN OF THE DAY is a response and a reinforcement of both.

The person who believes has what the words offer. Faith or belief is still another integral element in the Lord's Supper. The congregants are to cling to the words in faith and to receive the bread and wine in faith. This means that they are to be serious people. God is making signs toward them. For them to fail to discern these signs and thus remain in unbelief is something for which they are held responsible. Jesus often berated people for their unbelief. This does not mean that he attacked atheists or agnostics. He did not spend time criticizing people of mediocre intelligence who could not spit back all the appropriate intellectual answers to the catechism questions of his day. The unbelievers he scolded were usually the religious people of the day who could not recognize how God was

present in Christ. More often he chided his own disciples. Their unbelief led them to overlook the meaning of his words and his work among them, because they were constantly attempting to evade the cross and they wanted Jesus to escape it as well.

Unbelief would not let God be God. Unbelief would not let God choose to work through Jesus of Nazareth. Lack of faith was visible when people with empty lives tried to fill them with efforts to impress God: "Look, Lord, how'm I doing?" Jesus chose to praise faith among the simple folk who came to him, people who were not part of the historic people of God. These "little ones" were open to the healing he could give. These outsiders were the chief models for belief, as were the tax-collectors, prostitutes, and poor who had no place to go but to him for acceptance. Many of these outsiders became insiders. After his disciples saw Jesus risen from the dead, they too began to recognize him, especially "in the breaking of the bread." In the course of time the believers began to make a group response of faith, a CREED. Some of these responses were as short as "Jesus is Lord!"

In the course of centuries, certain formulas of faith developed, among them the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. In formal worship today most Christians include one or the other in the Lord's Supper, though nothing like them was uttered in the upper room at the first such meal. More likely, especially if that first supper was a Passover meal, the disciples present heard stories instead of reciting creeds. But while believers do not regard these formulas as having dropped from heaven or as being necessary for Holy Communion, they take delight in "confessing" them. This means that the worshipers stand up and boldly speak before God, each other, and the world their faith in God. They give voice to their commanding vision.

In some service books the *Credo* ("I believe") of the

Nicene Creed is translated "we believe"—in order to bring out the way Jesus Christ exists *as* congregation. The plural formulation stresses how the members share one faith as the limbs share one body. The Apostles' Creed is more personal: "I believe. . . ." We should probably think "I" when saying "we," and think "we" when saying "I," for here as so often in the Holy Communion we have to hold together two ideas that could easily be in tension or even fall apart.

The "for you" of the Lord's Supper is spoken to the whole congregation of the faithful and to each member personally. As the early accounts tell it, Jesus did not interrupt the common meal which was uniting the people and say anything like, "Bartholomew, over there in the back corner, you have nothing in common with anyone else around. I saw your 'I Found It!' bumper sticker telling me that you had fulfilled your quest. You have been telling everyone that you have decided for me as your personal Savior. That's good, and to recognize that, let me leave the pack and break a piece of bread off 'for you.' Now you can go home." Nor did Jesus say, "I don't care much about persons. I came not to save the individual but to save the whole world. Mine is to be a mass movement, and such movements are made up of masses, not persons. If I have to stop for each one of you, how can I make the rounds of all? I have come to save humanity. It is humans I have no time for." Both statements are inconceivable. We moderns make too sharp a distinction between belief in and through a people and belief on one's own or doing one's own thing in one's own way. In the biblical sweep, God is always saving a people. Once, we hear, Israel was not a people, but now it is a people. Not to belong to a people was a great horror. And yet within that people very vivid personalities stood out. A modern novelist can take four verses or four chapters of the Old Testament and write

four volumes of fiction based on them, as Thomas Mann did with the figure of Joseph. These ancient people were secure in their identity. As members of a people they knew who they were. They had more individuality than many people in the era of computers, people who go to extremes to have everything "custom-designed" and "personally styled" so that they can stand out.

The God who is saving a congregation also saves persons. The "for you" is for *each* of you, in your marvelous particularities. You, the alcoholic rising above your demon, and you, the suddenly unemployed mid-career executive. You, the proud parents of a newly baptized child, and you, the Peruvian peasant whose public life has seen none of the liberation that God would work among the people. You, the half-awake worshiper, and you, the alert one. You, the one who has doubts that this word and this meal will help overcome, and you who, having taken pains to think through all the dogma, sometimes think you know more about God than God does. Most of all, you who now gain confidence to express faith by reciting a creed full of astonishing statements like "We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." The moment you said those opening words, "We believe in one God," you set yourself up for those last words as well. Or is God to *stop* loving in the presence of death?

Neither creed in its articulation of faith uses directly the words that accompany the eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper, but all the words of both creeds address the commanding vision, the core of faith out of which all the rest flows. The Nicene Creed, especially when it speaks of Jesus Christ, becomes direct: "*For us* and for our salvation he came down from heaven; . . . *For our sake* he was crucified. . . ." On some days the congregation will

utter these words along with the act of baptism. On some days the people may not speak them at all. All life is to be an act of confession. Different words—in sermons, hymns, and prayers—can equally reinforce the response of a people.

If all members of a congregation can keep the “we” and the “I” of the creeds together, they will be prepared for those desperate moments when they will seem to be on their own. It has been said that just as one must believe for oneself, so one must die for oneself. Even if we are surrounded by our family and friends, our dying is the ultimately lonely act. Here the “for you” of personal faith is the strongest assurance of the divine presence. On such a day a messenger from the congregation may bring to you the food and drink of the Lord's Supper because you had to be away when the congregation gathered. This messenger will also bring words of encouragement and comfort. But there will also be a need for leave-taking. For that journey, this is the food; and to prepare for it, this faith is the road map. Yet it is also wrong to speak of our dying completely alone. Only Jesus had to utter a cry of abandonment, a shout that signaled how separated and alone he was. But God vindicated Jesus, and from that time on we die without being abandoned or alone. We die in company, as the Lord's Supper makes clear when it joins us with all who have gone before. We believe. I believe.

THE PRAYERS normally follow the creed. These can include intercessions. Intercession is loving your neighbor on your knees. While prayer for others was natural for those early Christians, or for the huddled faithful in Eastern Europe, at their best they took comfort in the fact that they were members of a church that went far beyond their own locale. So today the prayers are a place wherein Christians commit themselves to the good of the whole church and world, and their lives to action for the sake of that good.

Well into the Lord's Day, you suddenly detect a shift in the character of your observance. Despite all the talk about eating, up to this point it has been only that—talk. Up to this point you have heard descriptions, prescriptions, and recipes, though admittedly these give life in their own way. But a meal is an activity. And this week you decide to take special note of its movements. On one level, what follows is like a very slow dance, choreographed to match solemn moments. Behind much liturgy is the dance, a sign that people recognize how God wants us to enjoy the divine presence. The people have their steps to make, as do their leaders. Everything is studied and still graceful. God works through our gestures as God works through our words; we are asked to yield our bodies, and here is a chance to do just that.

In a pattern that recalls the earliest Communion, the minister offers the PEACE to the people. Then they may share it with each other. The former peace is spoken and embarrasses no one; it is easy to let it slide by unheard. The latter is gestured, and either upsets or thrills most people. The passing of the peace can take the pattern of rather formal hand greetings or more personal embraces. With it people speak a formula such as “the peace of Christ be with you” or some personally applied words of greeting. A member near you is just back from the hospital; surely you will mention that in the peace, as the minister does in the prayer. Whatever occurs between members, it should be as natural as possible, in order to recall the living-room character of early Christian worship, and not be so compulsive as to disrupt the flow and tone of the whole service.

Why does something that calls for motion of the body elicit every kind of sarcasm and ribaldry from nervous Christians? The New Testament writings are emphatic about the exchange of greetings and kisses of peace among believers. Yet when in the twentieth century conservative

liturgists set out to reach further back in the tradition to restore what later ages forgot, traditionalists began to sniff and snort in reaction against such "modern" tamperings. They resorted to every kind of colorful and putting-off phrase in order to attack the idea that Christian people should pass the peace of Christ to each other. You know, of course, that it is important to respect individual differences, and you need not expect the same kind of enthusiasm from everyone. But once you saw how the gestures of peace embodied a sense of the "for you" of the Lord's Supper, how they brought people into a vivid sense of union, you began to overcome your own reserve and to bear the burdens and share the joys of others. The peace is not the chief thing in the sacrament, by any means. Nor is it necessary for guests to greet one another when they come together for a meal in someone's house. They will receive the same number of calories with or without greetings.

While the whole motion of the Lord's Supper is toward you, it also includes pledges in return, called responses. These come to a climax in an OFFERTORY. Long ago, at the first Lord's Supper, Jesus and the disciples made provision for the meal itself. Today people offer not only bread and wine but other gifts which they want to give to God for God's work. Evangelical Christians once necessarily fought off the idea that the Lord's Supper was an achievement of their own. They dared not let it be a sacrifice designed to impress God, to tie God down to various obligations. They therefore began to underplay and even to negate responses. All the figurative arrows symbolizing direction came from heaven above to the earthly table, and from the sacred table to the sinful people.

If somewhere in the Christian world rearguard actions in that battle are still necessary, let the people beware of the Offertory. But battle lines change through the centuries.

One critic said he had gone to many churches and heard the preacher say, "Don't try to impress God with your works" or "Don't attempt to please God with your merits" or "Don't try to keep the rules and regulations and thus win your way." He looked around at nearly slumbering collections of utterly casual Christians and wondered, "Who's trying?"

The privilege of offering bread and wine, which are human reworkings of the divine gifts, and of bringing money to stand for other forms of earthly goods, is far too rich to be pushed aside because some people somewhere might think they are thereby trying to please God. You once asked yourself which was your greater temptation, to be compulsive about appeasing a God who would otherwise snuff out your existence, or to stir yourself up to do anything at all about the calls of God, and you decided that during your lifetime, response needed your major energies. And so today again you joined the great company of makers of bread and wine and money who through the centuries have helped provide for this meal and for the works of God associated with it. You were glad to see that the family that brought forth the bread and wine today were new members for whom this act took on special importance. The offerings are needed—by the people who make them. Though the Lord's Supper is complete in its motion "for you," a response from you seals it.

During the offering, you have a chance to think about the bread and wine while the ministers prepare for the eucharist. Through the ages people have debated these simple gifts. The early church gave no prescription beyond the word *bread* and the word *wine*. It is probably best to stay relaxed about that simplicity. If the original meal was a Passover feast recalling the flight of the children of Israel from Egypt, the bread would lack leaven. Since Passover

occurred in the spring, the wine by definition and chemical inevitability would have been fermented. But God can work through leavened or unleavened bread, and the wine could have been red or white. The idea of breaking one loaf preserves the biblical impulse best, as does sharing from one cup: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). If people find it more convenient to use many little bits of bread and many little cups, some of the pictorial element disappears, but the gift is still there. The picture then takes some explaining, just as Christians who in baptizing do not immerse people then have to draw verbal pictures in order to place proper emphasis on how baptism is a "burial" with Christ. You yourself found it more vivid when your congregation returned to the biblical custom of breaking one loaf and sharing one cup, but you didn't regard those who used other forms as weaker brothers and sisters. In fact, the more you thought about this debate, the less you thought about the character of bread and wine as such.

Someone has said that for the material side of the Christian faith, all you need are "a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine, and a river." Some people become nervous when you remind them that in this respect Christianity is a very material faith. They look for something spiritual and angelic, untouched and untainted by anything visible and earthly. You have perhaps seen advertisements for poultry which boast that the chickens "never touch the ground"; they spend their whole antiseptic lives suspended in little cages, as if contact with mother earth would make them less valuable. Some Christians have turned their back on God's creation so much that they like to think of their faith as never touching the ground. The Letter to the Hebrews

had to warn against that attitude (2:16ff.): "For surely it is not with angels that Christ is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect. . . ." The very material bread and wine come from the world of Christ's brothers and sisters, with whom he is concerned.

The chief thing in the sacrament is not a mysticism about natural elements. The use of bread and wine is not designed to lead you to a Walden Pond or an Orange County ravine, where you might commune with nature and thus become most intimate with God. This is not a festival of bread and wine as such. But why should anyone be nervous about connecting these gifts of earth, these nature gifts which are "for you," with the gifts of the eternal, the more than natural gifts which are "for you" as well? You resolve after today never again to look at a field of grain or a slope of grapes the casual way you did before. God is working through them and through the people who work with them. What comes from those very fields and vines might end up on the Lord's Table. Even if it does not, it can work to the purposes of God in other ways. You also resolve never to look again the same old way at the bread and wine of your own table. Why take for granted elements which God can use to make Christ present among us?

An old German Christmas chorale included these lines:

Tell abroad His goodness proudly,
Who our race hath honored thus,
That He deigns to dwell with us. . . .

Similarly, after this day you can tell abroad God's goodness proudly. He honored the earth by making use of its produce to dwell with us. Angels can fit in the plot somewhere, as can untainted and unstained realms of being. But the Lord's Supper brings us a Christ *along with*

elements that come from a natural order that allows for rust in grain and rancidity in wine. Christ and creation go together better than you thought.

A PRAYER and an exchange called THE PREFACE follow the offering. By preserving this exchange through the years, the church helped you retain some tone of praise before the meal: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give him thanks and praise." And the SANC-TUS, or "Holy, Holy, Holy" helped. You could picture Isaiah in the temple, having a vision of God. That helped bring a sense of the presence of God to your church. You could also hear in its "Hosanna" the shouts of the people who greeted Jesus on Palm Sunday when he entered Jerusalem. That lifted the service above the dreary and the ordinary. God, the "thrice holy," is present here.

Now in the GREAT THANKSGIVING you are able to sustain this note of presence, this spirit of awe and praise through the whole celebration. Some churches call this extended prayer "the eucharistic prayer." You recall how church leaders have only recently begun to recover the wider understandings of the biblical meal. There was once a time for only "the words of institution," that stark and bare running-together of the New Testament sayings of Jesus in the upper room. Some weeks the ministers may still read only those words. You get the feeling that, when they do, it is because everyone is in a hurry, though there may be other good reasons to read only them from time to time.

You remember how as a child, back before your feet touched the church floor and before you could sit a full hour and a quarter, your parents would bring you to church on "Communion Sunday." You would hear these words of institution but not quite understand what was going on. If you recall correctly, it seemed as if everyone became very sad at this point in the service. That emotion

was not completely out of place, because the words themselves do say that Jesus spoke them "in the night in which he was betrayed." It was then and is now a serious business to follow Jesus on his journey to the cross, and you have never quite come to terms with some of the "mod" liturgies that set out to celebrate but instead produce chiefly giddiness. So you do not want to make fun of the grimness of the old-style Communion. But something was missing in the overall attitude.

Some years later you went to confirmation instruction and started learning more about the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Most of this instruction concerned itself with the words of institution. You knew *something* happened when the minister spoke them, but what? You watched the sign of the cross being made over the bread as you heard "This is my body," and over the cup during "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." *That* must have been the moment when "it" happened; but, still, what was *it*? You puzzled everything out in a negative way. Adults told you, in effect, that our people believed less than did the people on the Christian right and more than the people on our left. On our right were Roman Catholics who, you were told, held to a purely magical concept. They said that at this moment the bread and wine changed into the body and blood of Jesus, even though they kept on looking like the same bread and wine. On our left were the Reformed and the Baptists who had a purely humanistic approach. These Christians said that at this moment nothing happened to the bread and wine. The Lord's Supper was simply a memorial feast, done "in remembrance of Jesus." The bread and wine were merely symbols that pious people used in order to focus their minds on God.

You may have gotten it all wrong while everyone else got it right—one can never be sure about a child's grasp of difficult subjects. Maybe the issues seemed difficult only to you. But for all your questioning, you did find the church

making a heavy investment in the words of institution without offering much of a positive understanding of the Lord's Supper. Never could you be content to hold to a view that was halfway between everyone else's without having much to say about your own position. Those old teachers of "our people," let it be said, were not all wrong. Medieval Roman Catholics were inclined to almost magical views, and even after the Reformation period Catholics did set down hard-line notions about how the substance of bread and wine changed. It was true that many of their devotions treated these substances as if they had supernatural curative powers. Popular piety may still do so. But contemporary statements of Roman Catholic faith about the sacramental presence of Christ are vastly different from those earlier approaches, and it is unfair to misrepresent the living faith of Catholic Christians today. Your theologians regularly sit down with them nowadays to discuss this presence of Christ, and the two parties cannot find any real differences between them. Maybe it is no fun for Christian factions to stop fighting. Certainly it is difficult to understand the Lord's Supper now, if formerly you depended on having an enemy position nearby to serve as a boundary against which you could prop up your own definition. But growth in the unity of the church of Christ more than compensates for those emotional losses.

On the other side, the so-called left side of the argument, it is not at all clear that everyone even in those days believed that bread and wine were *mere* bread and wine and that Jesus was *not* present in this meal except in the pious minds of the worshipers. In the religious battles of the sixteenth century both sides of the Protestant debate exaggerated the differences and misrepresented alternative views. This is not to say that there were not and are not differences. "Your" theologians have not been as confident about coming to early agreement with non-Catholic

Christianity about the Lord's Supper. But if Reformed Christianity still speaks often of the bread and wine as "symbols" of the body and blood, clearly the concept of symbol is changing. You are less likely to hear the elements spoken of as "mere" symbols, and whenever the word *mere* disappears, there is motion toward a new understanding. In any case, it is harder than it was four centuries ago for you to define your Lord's Supper when the people you were taught to call the enemy on the left change position.

The Great Thanksgiving or eucharistic prayer is a way of helping congregations come to a more positive and more fully biblical understanding of what went on in the first Lord's Supper. To say that at the Lord's Supper you should hear the bare words of institution because the Bible reports only on them, and because this economy will make your mass closer to the mass of Christ, is false. Jesus did in fact say prayers and blessings at that meal—we are confident of that, as confident as we can be of anything else about early Christian faith and worship. At the time of the Reformation, church leaders cut back on much of what they might have thought Jesus had said and done because in their time the eucharistic prayer had come to be locked in to what was called the canon of the mass. And that meant it was linked to some ideas that were almost magical and to other ideas that suggested Christians were bringing sacrifices to please God. The Reformers could tolerate neither idea, so they swept the chancel clean by throwing out the whole eucharistic prayer.

Not having to fight their battle, at least not in their way, Christians today are free to recover the larger biblical set of meanings. To continue to deprive you and your fellow worshipers of these meanings by reading only the words of institution is to preserve an unfair and very modern (sixteenth-century) approach in place of the more ancient, conservative, and biblical (first-century) one.

You listen closely today as the minister leads you in the eucharistic prayer. The praise of the Father for the great gift of Jesus and for this meal continues. You keep alive an awareness of all creation, that creation from which comes the bread and wine on which you depend and through which the presence of God is known today. In this prayer you recall the sense of story, remembering how bound up with faith is the narrative about Abraham, Israel, the prophets. Your prayer comes to its climax when you thank God for sending the Son. All this is a Christian reenactment of the praises and blessings that Jesus spoke in the words of institution when he gave thanks over the bread he broke and the cup he shared. The Holy Spirit, who "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church" is God in action. This Spirit makes the "thrice holy" present in the here and now. You do not think of this remembrance of Christ as the annual meeting of a burial society. Neither is this narrative only a historical record about people of old. The Great Thanksgiving surrounds the present-making power of God. After this you find no need to go out hunting for ways to meet the Lord or to have an experience of God by your private enterprise, mental tricks, or the climbing of mystical ladders. This prayer celebrates the way God is with you and the congregation. It takes some act of energy and imagination now to deny God, to turn your back on the presence.

In this context, you now hear the words of institution exactly as you did years before, with startling clarity. But now the pressure is off them. You no longer find yourself wondering what kind of change is occurring during a ministerial sign of the cross over bread and wine. This prayer adds a word of Paul that connects your celebration with the people who do not yet share the presence: "For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." The con-

gregation then erupts with three shouts in three tenses: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again."

Because the idea of mere remembrance is too weak to sustain the presence of God, it is easy to forget the specific command of Jesus to share this act "for the remembrance of me." So the Great Thanksgiving picks up the idea of remembering and brings it into focus. "With this bread and cup we remember the life our Lord offered for us." He has come with this bread and cup, and now we remember him with it. The former use is instrumental: Christ makes an agent of bread and wine. He uses it to come to your midst. God comes with it "for you . . . for forgiveness." You then naturally look ahead, as Jesus did, toward another kind of reunion with him. "Believing the witness of his resurrection," you reborn people "await his coming in power to share with us the great and promised feast." You respond with early Christians: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." One side of your mind does not want the end of human history to come so soon. You want to see your children grow to maturity. You have a friendly meal with neighbors planned for late afternoon. You love this world since you have come to know its natural wonders. But "Come, Lord Jesus" reminds you that the Lord of history has more in store for you than stretched-out rainy Sunday afternoons, the treadmill, the rat race, one thing after another, and otherwise purposeless existence.

The Great Thanksgiving closes with a call for the Holy Spirit to be present. Today you hear much about the presence of the Holy Spirit. A charismatic or pentecostal movement in the churches, including your church, is making special efforts to realize and claim this presence. You personally may have not been attracted to the movement, though you welcome some of the vitalities it brings wherever it does not divide congregations and make second-class Christians of those who do not join it. But the charismatics are not in the forefront of your mind at this

hour. You care about the way the Holy Spirit is called for and comes with this gathering, with this bread and wine of a sacred meal. Who could ask anything more than this kind of awesome intimacy? "Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit, the spirit of our Lord and of his resurrection, that we who receive the Lord's body and blood may live to the praise of your glory and receive our inheritance with all your saints in light." This meal is to become effective in your life, and for that the Holy Spirit must be the agent. "Amen. Come, Holy Spirit." With the answer to this prayer in the form of the coming of the Holy Spirit, you have to be ready for a changed life. Your body, the one that will soon receive the gift of God in the eating of this meal, is also a temple of the Holy Spirit. Take care of it. Take care.

You do not have much time to think during the last few lines of the Great Thanksgiving, but you try today, as you have tried before, to let your imagination soar as you hear: "Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place. . . ." The grand prayer of blessing over the bread and the cup is also a way of affirming the whole church. Those servants of every time and place include a vast and diverse company but also some very specific persons known well to you. Not only the huddled East Europeans, the charismatic Christians of Chile, the disciples in the upper room, the smugglers of bread and wine into concentration camps, but also your father in a nursing home, those new parents just two pews ahead, the people being baptized today who will share this table for the first time, and . . . you, you sinner. You, you servant. You, you saint. Sensing the breadth and the depth, you find it easy to utter a doxology, a song of praise to the Holy Trinity: "Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever."

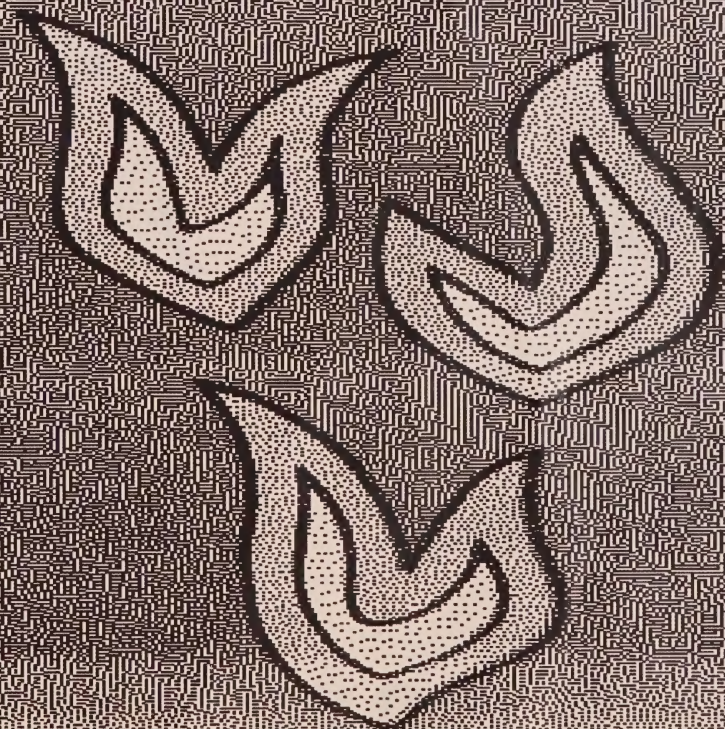
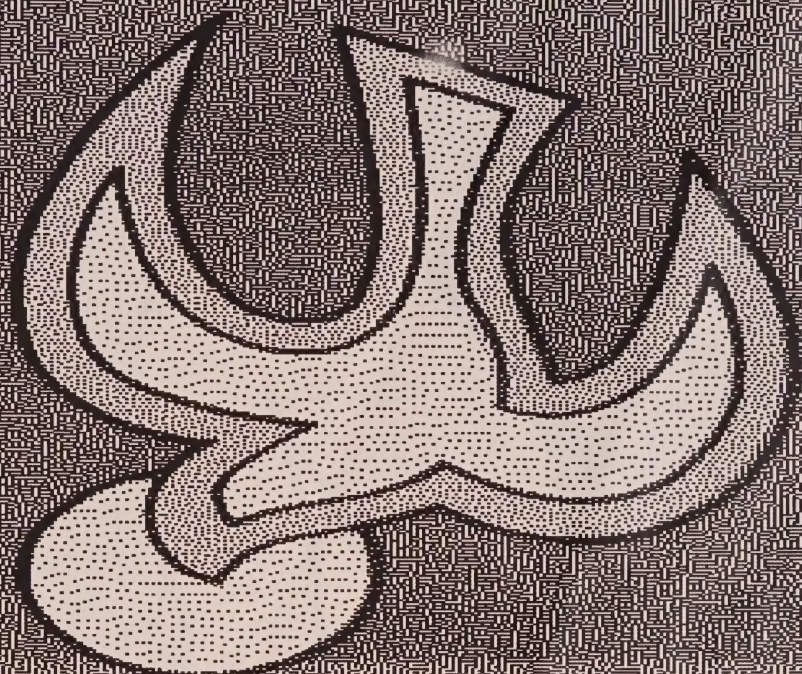
During this doxology the minister ordinarily lifts the bread and the cup, even holds them high. Call Martin Luther in to explain why:

It signifies that Christ has commanded us to remember him. For just as the sacrament is bodily elevated, and yet Christ's body and blood are not seen in it, so he is also remembered and elevated by the word of the sermon and is confessed and adored in the reception of the sacrament. In each case he is apprehended only by faith; for we cannot see how Christ gives his body and blood for us and even now daily shows and offers it before God to obtain grace for us.

You have never heard those words before, but they do set off a chain of reflections about the presence of Christ. You postpone such reflection until the time for Communion, when you do not want to have an idle mind.

Suddenly you are praying your table prayer for the meal. It is not "God is great, God is good," "Come, Lord Jesus," "The eyes of all wait upon thee," or any of the other table graces you use at home. Instead you join in praying THE LORD'S PRAYER, the "Our Father" that Christ taught his people. The meal follows.

Just as Jesus, being a Jew at a special dinner, would have taken some bread and wine before he passed or carried it to others, so the minister takes some or receives it from one of the Communion assistants, and then the congregation participates. Your turn comes and you hear, "The body of Christ, given for you. . . . The blood of Christ shed for you." "For you": The plural is singular now. It is into your hand that the minister places the bread, and it is your mouth that receives the cup. You do not stop being a member of the congregation—no act besides this brings you closer to others—but just as you must die for yourself, you must also believe for yourself and receive for





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THE ADVENT SEASON

The Meaning of Advent

Advent, a season of four Sundays, opens the church year. The season begins on the Sunday closest to St. Andrew's Day, November 30. The observance of Advent originated in France during the fourth century. The duration of the season varied from four to seven weeks until the Bishop of Rome in the sixth century set the season at four weeks. In ancient times Advent was strictly observed: every Christian was required to attend church services and fast daily.

The word, Advent, consists of two Latin words: *ad* — *venire*, "to come to." Advent's message is that God in Christ is coming to the world. This coming may be:

1. *A past experience.* God did come in Christ at Christmas. The prophets' promise was fulfilled in the Babe.
2. *A present experience.* God may come to you this Christmas in terms of rebirth, either for the first time, or a renewed birth in deeper dimensions of reality.
3. *A future experience.* Christ will return unpredictably at the end of the world. "He shall come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead."

The Message of Advent

Since Advent promises the sure coming of the Lord, its message is "prepare." The Lord is coming whether the world is ready or not. For those unprepared, his coming means judgment. For those ready for his coming, it means salvation.

How does Advent suggest that we prepare?

1. *Repentance* — forsake the sins of the world for a godly way of life.
2. *Prayer* — pray for the coming of Christ, for he shall save.
3. *Patience* — his coming may be delayed. Watch and wait, for his coming may be sudden.

The Mood of Advent

1. *Expressed in color.* The mood of Advent is expressed in the liturgical color, violet. It depicts a feeling of quiet dignity, royalty, and repentance. Violet was the traditional color of a king's robe; the coming Christ is King of kings. Advent, like Lent, is a time for solemn and sober thought about one's sins, leading to repentance. It denotes a quiet time for watching, waiting, and praying for Christ to come again, either personally or universally. An alternate color for Advent is blue, the color of hope.

2. *Solemnity and sobriety.* Advent is a time to become aware of one's sins. Traditionally, Advent is a penitential season, originally known as the "Winter Lent." This mood of sobriety is expressed not only in the liturgical color, violet, but in the music of Advent hymns like "O Come, Emmanuel." During Advent choirs may omit processions or have "silent processions." Weddings in this season are discouraged. Christmas carols and decorations are often delayed until Christmas Eve.

3. *Joy in hope.* Advent stresses not so much fulfillment as anticipation of fulfillment: the Lord is coming! Christians have great expectations of Christ's coming again. As a family looks forward to a son returning from a war and as a bride anticipates her wedding day, so a Christian looks forward with joy to Christ's coming. Yet, this is a different kind of joy — a joy of hope amid solemnity. It is the quiet joy of anticipation and not the joy of celebration of a past event. This type of joy is expressed in the Advent hymns: "Joy to the World, the Lord is come(ing)," and "O Come Emmanuel . . . Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel."

The Observance of Advent

Increasingly the church is beginning to observe Advent seriously as a vital and necessary time of preparation for a meaningful, spiritual Christmas. This observance is expressed in various ways:

The sheep and the goats will be divided. Does this suggest that at the Return, half will be saved? Why not all? Apparently, universalism was not in Jesus' mind.

3. *Ready (v. 44).* To be ready for the Parousia is a "must". Not to be ready is to be lost just as the people in Noah's day were not ready with boats for the flood. A commercial says, "Delta is ready when you are." This is not the case with Jesus' return. He is not waiting for us to be ready. Whether we are ready or not, he is coming. Not to be ready spells eternal disaster. What does it mean to be "ready"? To be ready for the end is to live daily in a state of grace. If we are always reconciled to God by faith in Christ, it does not matter when Christ will return.

Lesson 1 Isaiah 2:1-5

1. *Latter (v. 2).* Isaiah tells us what will happen in the "latter" days. This refers to the end of the world. We may be living in the "latter" days now. According to today's scientists, we are close to a nuclear holocaust that would spell doom for the world. In January 1984, on the advice of forty-seven scientists, the doomsday clock was set ahead one minute to three minutes before midnight. We are living on the edge of extinction.

2. *All (v. 2)* In the latter days "all the nations" will see God on the highest mountain on earth. God will be the highest value and the center of the universe. They will come to God to receive his instruction how to live. This will result in international peace. The significance of "all" is that world peace depends upon "all" coming to God? Peace is not a unilateral project. Will it be possible to get "all" nations to come to God? If they are to come at the end-time, why not now? Here is one good reason for the church's overseas missionary program.

3. *Between (v. 4).* When the nations gather on the mountain of God, there will be judgment. Usually we think of judgment as punishment. Not in this case: the word, "between", indicates that God will settle the disputes among the nations. He will judge justly and all nations will be satisfied. The result is that no nation will have reason to go to war to right a wrong.

Lesson 2 Romans 13:11-14

1. *Night (v. 12).* According to Paul, we are living in the "night" of this pre-Parousia time. But, he believed that the night is far spent. It is time to get awake to the new day of Christ's return. Night is the time to sleep and since the dawn is here, we need to get awake to greet the dawn. Moreover, evil is associated with darkness. To live in the day, we need to get rid of our evil ways.

2. *Day (v. 12).* The "day" is associated with Christ's return. Jesus said he was the light of the world. With him comes the light of a new day. Righteousness is allied with the light. We are to live in the light of his truth and peace. Therefore, we are children of the light living in a dark world of sin. But, when Christ comes, there will be no more night.

3. *Put on (v. 14).* When Augustine heard a child's voice say, "Take and read", he opened his Bible and read this verse. Obediently, he "put on" Christ and he became one of our greatest Christians. To "put on" means to be incorporated into Christ so that one is "a man in Christ". To be ready for the Parousia, we put on Christ so that in us Christ confront himself. We are his people. He is one of us. To be properly dressed for the Parousia, we are to put on Christ's robe of righteousness. This calls for a human response. Christ is coming. We are to be ready by putting on Christ. This we do at baptism.

Preaching Possibilities

Preaching During Advent

1. Purpose of Advent.

Advent is a period of preparation. We preach during Advent to prepare our people:

For a true celebration of the Incarnation.

For the Parousia.

For a rebirth of Christ at Christmas.

If Advent is not observed as a time of preparation and if Christmas celebration is substituted for Advent, then:

We become tired of Christmas when Christmas arrives.

We have nothing special to celebrate on Christmas because we have been celebrating for four weeks.

We are not spiritually ready for Christ to be reborn in us at Christmas. Therefore, for the good of the people, preachers will insist upon a strict observance of Advent in their congregations and will preach on Advent themes.

THE EPIPHANY SEASON

A History of Epiphany

Next to Easter, Epiphany is the oldest season of the church year. In Asia Minor and Egypt, Epiphany was observed as early as the second century. The Festival of the Epiphany fell and still falls on January 6. It was observed as a unitive festival — both the birth and baptism of Jesus were celebrated at this time.

January 6 was chosen as Epiphany Day because it was the winter solstice, a pagan festival celebrating the birthday of the sun god. In 331 B.C. the solstice was moved to December 25, but January 6 continued to be observed. Christians substituted Epiphany for the solstice. The emphasis was upon the re-birth of light. In keeping with this time, the First Lesson for Epiphany Day is appropriate: "Arise, shine; for your light has come."

The unitive Festival of Epiphany was divided when December 25 was chosen as the birthday of Jesus. The church in the East continued to celebrate Epiphany in terms of the baptism of Jesus while the Western church associated Epiphany with the visit of the Magi. For the East the baptism of Jesus was more vital because of the Gnostic heresy claiming that only at his baptism did Jesus become the Son of God. On the other hand, to associate Epiphany with the Magi is appropriate, for the Magi did not get to Bethlehem until a year after Jesus' birth. By this time the holy family was in a house rather than in a stable. Consequently, the Magi could not have been a part of the manger scene as is popularly portrayed in today's Christmas scenes and plays. The new lectionary and calendar combine the two by placing the visit of the Magi on Epiphany Day and the Baptism of Jesus on Epiphany 1.

The Name of Epiphany

In the church year Epiphany Day is a major festival, similar to Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. In spite of this, more churches ignore January 6 as the Day of Epiphany because it usually falls on a weekday. For Roman Catholics it is a day of obligation to attend Mass.

The name "Epiphany," means "Manifestation." The light manifests itself in the darkness, God reveals himself in Jesus, and the glory of God is seen in Jesus. In the course of history Epiphany was known by other names: Feast of the Manifestation, Feast of Lights, Feast of the Appearing of Christ, Feast of the Three Kings, and The Twelfth Day.

The Season of Epiphany

Six out of seven years the Festival of the Epiphany falls on a weekday. The Sundays after January 6 are entitled "Sunday after the Epiphany."

Epiphany is an accoridian season. The number of weeks it is observed depends upon the date of Easter. If Easter comes early, the season is short; if it is late, the season of Epiphany is long. In early times the length of the Epiphany season ranged from three to ten weeks. From the sixth century, Epiphany was restricted to six Sundays at the most. In the Eastern church it was the custom to announce on Epiphany Day the upcoming date of Easter. The length of the season depended on the announced date.

Now the Epiphany season extends from six to nine Sundays. With the appearance of the new lectionary and calendar in 1970, the season was lengthened to a possible nine weeks because the former pre-Lenten season of three Sundays was made a part of Epiphany.

The Color of Epiphany

The color used in the paraments denotes the mood and meaning of the season. White is used for three Sundays: Epiphany Day, The Baptism of our Lord (Epiphany 1), and Transfiguration. White is used for these three big days because it is a time of celebration. White expresses light, glory, victory, and celebration.

Green is used on the Sundays other than the above three. Green is the color of growth. During Epiphany we are to grow into a fuller realization of the nature of Christ as the Son of God. Sunday after Sunday there is growth in God's revealing his glory in Jesus.

The Meaning and Message of Epiphany

1. The Epiphany Star — Epiphany is associated with the star that led the Wise Men to the manger. The Epiphany star is a five-pointed star representing the Incarnation. It is not a six-pointed star, for this is the star of David, representing the Old Testament with its prophecies. It is not a seven-pointed star which is the star of perfection. Nor is it an eight-pointed star which stands for regeneration and is associated with baptism.

The purpose of the star of Bethlehem was to guide men to Christ. The star is help from above in bringing us to Christ. This is one reason why Epiphany is the time for the church's emphasis upon evangelism.

The star also guides us into the truth of this new-born child in the manger. We are led to an ever-deepening understanding of the nature of Jesus. We are to come eventually to see that Jesus is God's Son as stated at his baptism, "You are my beloved son." Just before the Transfiguration, Peter gets the insight, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Epiphany ends on the mountain of Transfiguration with God again saying that Jesus is his beloved Son. One purpose of Epiphany is to bring people to this same conviction as preparation for Lent, for the meaning of the cross is in the fact that the man on the cross is "the Lamb of God."

2. The Epiphany Candle — Another symbol of the season is the candle which sheds its light into a dark world. Christ is the light of the world. He comes into the world as a baby, a small, frail candle. It is the nature of light to scatter and annihilate the darkness. Light brings enlightenment to mankind, resulting in vision and insight. Because of light, there is manifestation and revelation. During Epiphany we see the light of God in Jesus. He reveals, shows, manifests God. Light has certain characteristics. It is a *given* light. The light comes from God, from the star. Man is not the light. At best he can only reflect the light. It is a light that grows in intensity. The candle grows and grows until it becomes as bright as the sun. Throughout Epiphany the light of God's glory is seen increasingly in Jesus until the Transfiguration when his clothes and face are as bright as the sun. You may think of it in terms of concentric circles: a small circle around the flame of the candle until the last circle is as wide as the world. The baby Jesus grows to a mature man of thirty when he is seen as the Son of God. A third characteristic of light is that it *gives itself*. The candle gives light only by virtue of its burning itself up. Light to be light must give, expend, and die to self. At the end of Epiphany we see the light of Christ, at its brightest, but it burns itself out on the cross, only to be re-kindled on Easter.

Epiphany and the Church

1. A time of worship — Epiphany is a season of worship because it deals with the glory of God manifested in Jesus. The season begins with the Wise Men's coming to worship the newborn king. The season ends with the worship experience on Mount Transfiguration. When people see Jesus as God's Son, they instinctively fall down to worship him as Lord.

2. A Time to Witness — Epiphany is the season of light, and light shows and reveals. The light burns so that all might see the truth and the way to God. It is the time for emphasis upon evangelism, the telling of the good news, the spreading of the light of Christ in a dark world. Christ is the light and Christians reflect that light in the world. They are light-bearers, and they are to go through life lighting candles.

3. A Time to Win — The universal Christ is the center of Epiphany. This is the teaching of Epiphany Day with the coming of the Gentile kings to worship Jesus as Lord. The light of Christ knows no end; it goes to the ends of the earth. He is the light to lighten the Gentiles. The church goes about her business of winning the world for Christ. The light of Christ is not merely to shine on Christians but through them to the salvation of human-kind. During this season the church places emphasis upon the cause of world missions. It is the outreach time of the church.

THE LENTEN SEASON

The Lenten season may not be the longest season in the church year but it is one of the most important seasons, if not the most important season of the year. It is a time for spiritual preparation through repentance and growth in faith for Easter. It is the time of the church year when the passion and death of the Savior come into focus. It begins with a special day of repentance, Ash Wednesday, and ends in the depth of sorrow and tragedy on Good Friday. The name of the season, Lent, does not reflect the mood or message of the season. It is an old Anglo-Saxon word *Lencten* or *Lenchthen*, which means the lengthening of the days as spring appears. To preach meaningfully and properly, a preacher needs to know the message of Lent and feel its mood and spirit.

Development of the Season

Lent as a period of forty days came into being as a result of a long period of development. Originally in the first century Lent was only a period of forty hours in keeping with the forty hours Jesus' body was in the tomb. The forty-hour observance ended with an Easter service at 3 a.m. Later the forty hours grew into six days during the third century. The six days were not the last week in Lent but an extension of the forty hours. These six days were known as Holy Week, days of strict abstinence. Holy Week observance began in Jerusalem during the fourth century. Services were held on the appropriate day at the places where special events took place during the last week of Jesus' life: the Upper Room, Gethsemane, Pilate's Court, etc. When Holy Week was observed in the West, they substituted the stations of the cross for the actual places in Jerusalem. Rome placed special emphasis upon the triduum: Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter. In the fourth century, the days of Holy Week were designated:

- Palm Sunday — entry into Jerusalem
- Monday — the cleansing of the temple
- Tuesday — The Discourse on the Mount of Olives
- Wednesday — Judas agreement
- Maundy Thursday — Upper Room meeting
- Good Friday — Calvary
- Saturday — the rest in the tomb

The six days grew into thirty-six days, as a tithe of the 365 days of the year. By approximately 731, the time of Charlemagne, four days were added to the thirty-six to make the present season of forty days. The four days consisted of Ash Wednesday to the First Sunday in Lent. The number forty was a popular and meaningful number: Jesus was tempted for forty days in the wilderness, Moses fasted forty days on Sinai, Elijah fasted forty days on the way to the mountain of God, and the Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness.

Sundays were never a part of Lent. We speak of the Sundays *in* Lent, not *of* Lent. The Sundays are known by their Latin names which come from the first Latin word of Introit: *Invocabit*, *Judica*, etc. However, the Lenten emphasis spilled over into the Sunday services in terms of the use of the penitential color, violet, and the dropping of the *Alleluia* and the *Gloria in Excelsis*.

This duration of Lent is not universal. The Eastern Orthodox church extends Lent over an eight-week period. Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday are not considered a part of Lent and are exempted as fast days.

The Date of Lent

Lent begins forty-six days before Easter in spite of the fact that Lent is a season of forty days. This is due to the fact that Sundays are not a part of Lent. When Lent begins, depends upon the date of Easter. In 325 the church decided that Easter would fall on the first Sunday after the full moon which occurs on or after March 21.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. The name "Ash Wednesday," was given by Pope Urban II in 1099. Prior to this, the first day of Lent was known as "Beginning of the Fast." The day was set aside as a special day of repentance and as the opening of a season of repentance. "Ash" symbolized the repentance called for. Priests had the custom of sprinkling ashes on the heads of the faithful as they said, "Remember thou art dust and to dust thou shalt

The Present Observance of Lent

Especially among Protestants today, people are not sympathetic with the mood or methods of Lenten observance. Each year there is a cry by someone for a shorter Lenten period, the dropping of fasting, and the elimination of special Lenten services. Generally, Protestants ignore fasting as being superficial and meaningless. At Vatican II, Roman Catholics relaxed the rules for fasting: Meat may be eaten on Fridays and breakfast may be enjoyed before Holy Communion. People are too comfortable, lax, and affluent to be bothered about self-denial. Because attendance is very poor, many churches no longer have mid-week Lenten services. Many non-liturgical churches never had Lenten services. Moreover, Lent as a time for special personal devotions is not observed by most Christians today even though denominations may produce special Lenten devotional booklets for this purpose.

Lent can be the most fruitful season of the church year as the faithful strictly and sincerely observe the season. It can be a time of spiritual development and preparation for the resurrection.

1. *Penitence.* Lent is a period of self-denial and fasting, a period of spiritual discipline. Persons need this aspect of Lent because they have become flabby, affluent, and lazy. The theme of the day is, "You owe it to yourself," "Enjoy, Enjoy," "Let yourself go and live it up." Lent is a pilgrimage with Jesus to suffering and death. This involves discipline and self-denial. If we expect to rise with Christ in newness of life on Easter, we must first die with him. Lent is a time of learning to die to self. Before we can rejoice, we must mourn. Before we can live, we must die. The problem people face today is their unwillingness to die in order to live. In a world when crime multiplies, selfishness reigns, and sex dominates society, we need a period in which to repent and return to God. This is what Lent is for.

2. *Teaching.* Originally, Lent was a time for preparing candidates for baptism at Easter. Teaching them was a part of their preparation. Lent today can be used to teach people through doctrinal sermons and Bible study, both in groups and as individuals. Lent lends itself to a program of daily Bible reading. A series of sermons on the Creed is appropriate. Lent as a time of growth in the knowledge of the Lord is needed in a world of biblical illiteracy.

3. *Outreach.* During Lent, especially, the cross is uplifted. "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me." Christ died for the sins of all people. During Lent we witness to the cross and its meaning as redemption. This naturally leads to an outreach to the inactive and unchurched of the community. Through a Lenten program of evangelism, many new members may be received on Palm Sunday or Easter. Traditionally, Lent is the period of evangelism.

4. *Prayer.* Lent can be used today as a special period for extra prayer, both private and public. It calls for spending an extra period in personal prayer. It means scheduling additional services during the weeks of Lent. Through these spiritual exercises, a person is to have a closer walk with God and a dearer company with Christ. By the end of Lent, a person should be built up in his faith. Easter should find him more dedicated to God's work and more consecrated to Christ. As a period of spiritual stimulation, Lent can mean a retreat, a renewal, and a revival in the church.

Preaching During Lent

1. *Opportunity.* During Lent, preaching has its bonanza. Many preachers are in the pulpit as often between Ash Wednesday and Easter as they are in a normal period of six months. Lent can mean a full program of preaching at morning services, evening services, midweek Lenten services, Holy Week services, and possibly noonday Lenten services for business people. It is traditionally the time when series of sermons are presented on Lenten themes. Lent calls for a variety of preaching: meditative, doctrinal, evangelistic. It is the most important time for preaching because it deals with the passion and cross. These constitute the heart of the Christian faith. When the cross is preached, we deal with the fundamental problems and needs of life.

2. *Problem.* Preaching during Lent is becoming increasingly a problem for the minister who wants to get across the Lenten message. This is particularly the case if he follows the lectionary and church year.

Consider the ideal situation which existed in the past:

- a. Sunday mornings — preaching on the pericopes.
- b. Sunday evenings — preaching on the doctrines of the church.
- c. Midweek Lenten services — preaching on Lenten themes.
- d. Daily Holy Week services — preaching on the passion and death of Christ.

Consider the situation that exists today. Sunday evening services are on the way out for many churches. Midweek Lenten services are either very poorly attended or have been canceled. If they are poorly attended, the preacher feels that the majority of his people are not hearing the message of the cross. Holy Week services are limited to Maundy Thursday when the Lord's Supper is administered and only a brief meditation on Communion is delivered, and to Good Friday when a series of very brief messages on the Last Seven Words by guest preachers are heard. If a minister follows the lectionary for Lent, when does he have the time and opportunity to preach the cross and dwell on the passion?

3. *Solutions.* The modern preacher confronting the above problem can find a solution in different approaches.

a. *Ideal situation.* With courage and determination, he schedules a full program of services on Sundays and midweek. He uses the lectionary on Sunday mornings, doctrinal themes on Sunday evenings, provided they are held, and Lenten subjects at the midweek Lenten services.

b. *Lenten services on Sunday evenings.* If it is utterly impossible to hold midweek Lenten services or, if held, impossible to get an acceptable attendance, the Lenten services might be held on Sunday evenings. It needs to be remembered that Sundays are not considered a part of Lent but are Sundays in Lent. Sundays are festival days. Accordingly, the lectionary does not deal with the passion and cross. A compromise may be made under the circumstances to hold the Lenten services on Sunday evenings.

c. *Sunday mornings.* If it is possible to hold services during Lent only on Sunday mornings, the preacher may feel impelled to disregard the lectionary during Lent and preach on Lenten themes. This would be most regrettable, but it may be better than failing to deal with the passion and cross, the heart of our faith. Surely, the cross is to some extent in every sermon, but Lent is the time to give special and extended consideration to the sufferings and death of our Lord.

Lent and the New Lectionary

Aware of the changes that have taken place in today's observance of Lent, the new lectionary adjusts to the situation.

One change is in the name of the sixth Sunday in Lent, formerly known as "Palm Sunday," to Passion Sunday. In the old lectionary, Passion Sunday was the fifth Sunday in Lent. The change results from a realization of the fact that most churches neglect the history of the passion by not holding Holy Week services, the traditional time to deal with the passion. Now on the sixth Sunday, Palm Sunday, with its observance of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, is subordinated to Passion Sunday. The new lectionary suggests the observance of the triumphal entry as an introductory part of the service. The Gospel for the day is a lengthy one, giving the biblical account of the passion events. Since Holy Wednesday night's service, if one is held, usually deals with a cantata; and since Maundy Thursday is a celebration of the institution of the Lord's Supper, and since Good Friday's noon service consists of a brief meditation on the last seven words and the evening service is usually a *Tenebrae* service with no sermon, the one opportunity of Holy Week to preach on the Passion is Lent 6.

There is suggested a change also in the colors for Lent and Holy Week. The traditional color for Lent through Holy Week except Good Friday is purple. An alternate color for Ash Wednesday is black because on this day of repentance the Christian is to die to self. White is suggested as an alternate color on Maundy Thursday to celebrate the beginning of the Lord's Supper. During Holy Week, red is suggested in place of purple to remind people of the sacrifice being made that week. In place of black on Good Friday, it is suggested that an alternate color could be a deeper shade of red than used during Holy Week to reflect the blood of the cross shed for the redemption of the world.

THE EASTER SEASON

The Name of Easter

Easter is the old English adaptation of the pagan name, "Eastre," which was the name of a Teutonic goddess of spring and dawn. Her festival occurred annually at the vernal equinox. The original name for Easter was Pascha, a Hebrew word for Passover. The death and resurrection constituted a new passover for the people of God, a deliverance from the slavery of death. Before Easter became popular as a name, the day was known as "The Lord's Day of Resurrection" and "Paschal Day of the Resurrection."

A History of Easter

Easter is the oldest Christian festival and is the source of the rest of the church year. On the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the dead. This was the apex of Christian fact and devotion. Each Sunday thereafter was celebrated as a "little Easter." Eventually the resurrection's being observed on the first day of the week, changed the day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to the Lord's Day (Sunday). For the Eastern church Easter marked the beginning of the church year.

The ancient church celebrated Easter for an octave, (eight days) each day through the following Sunday. Those baptized on Easter were required to attend the services. They wore white baptismal robes and consequently the first Sunday after Easter was known as "White Sunday." Originally Easter was one unit from Easter to Pentecost, but later it was divided into resurrection, ascension, and pentecost. The new lectionary (1970) returns to making Easter a season of fifty days, from Easter to Pentecost with Ascension Day considered a part of the Easter celebration. As a result, we now refer to the "Sunday of Easter" rather than "Sundays after Easter."

Easter has always been for Christians the feast of feasts. There is no event more important to the Christian. Its primacy was shown by the fact that the resurrection was celebrated each Sunday, and for that reason each Sunday of the church year is considered a festival. The importance of Easter can be seen in the fact that Easter is preceded by a period of preparation — the Lenten season of forty days. Likewise, Easter is observed for a season of fifty days. Moreover, Easter is so important that the entire church year revolves around it. Other festivals and seasons depend upon the date of Easter which varies from year to year.

Easter Day opens the Easter season, but does not close the Lenten season. Thinking that it does is a common mistake in our time. If it did, the Easter season would be a let-down in church attendance, work, and interest. If Easter closes the Lenten season, then the church feels the "show is over," and it is time to go back to business as usual. This is rooted in a misunderstanding of the Lenten season which for some is the chief season of the year. Rather, Easter, based upon the supreme act of God in raising the Son from the dead, is the chief event for the Christian. If this were understood, the church would have its greatest period of interest and activity during the Easter season.

The Date of Easter

Christians are still not agreed on the date of Easter. In ancient times non-Christians lampooned Christians for not being able to decide upon the date of their chief event. As early as the middle of the second century, the church disagreed about the date. The issue was supposedly settled by the Council of Nicea in A.D.325. All Christians were ordered to accept this date: "On the first Sunday after the full moon on or after the first day of Spring, March 21, or if the full moon is on Sunday, the next Sunday after." Thus, Easter may fall between March 22 and April 25. In spite of this, western and eastern Christians have different dates for Easter. The West lives by the Gregorian calendar and the East uses the Julian calendar which is ten days behind the Gregorian. Today there is a movement afoot to have all branches of the church accept April 8 as the date of Easter for all Christians.

The Mood of Easter

Needless to say, Easter is the highest of the high days in the church calendar. Easter is the queen of feasts. True Christians everywhere celebrate the resurrection. On Easter morning it is an ancient tradition for Christians to greet each other as follows: "Christ the Lord is risen!" Answer: "He is risen indeed!"

Joy. Easter is prime time for rejoicing. It is the church's happy day. The "alleluia" dropped for Lent is heard once more. The Lenten fast is ended, and there is rejoicing not only for a return to normal eating but for the fact that now there is no reason to fast. This joy is expressed in a fourteenth century hymn: "Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!"

Life. Easter means eternal life for the believer in Christ. This is symbolized by the abundance of flowers used on Easter.

Newness. The risen Christ is a "new" being with a glorified body. He is now the exalted Christ, the eternal Christ not touched by death. This newness for a Christian through dying and rising with Christ is expressed in the custom of wearing new clothes on Easter.

Hope. Easter brings hope to those who have dead loved ones and to the dying. The resurrection brings assurance that we too shall live with Christ forever. Death has been conquered by the resurrection.

Victory. Jesus is delivered from the worst of the world and the worst of Satan — the power of death. Like a mighty warrior, Christ comes forth from the grave as victor. Christians express their joy over this victory of Christ and participate in his victory by faith. This note of victory is expressed in a seventeenth century Latin hymn: "The strife is o'er, the battle done; now is the Victor's triumph won . . ."

The Color of Easter

The mood of Easter is reflected and expressed in the liturgical color. It is white because it expresses celebration, festivity, joy, and victory. Gold may be used as an alternate color for Easter Day to express the special prominence of the greatest day of the church year.

THE PENTECOST SEASON

(Sundays in Ordinary Time)

Pentecost as a Festival

In the church year Pentecost is a major festival, a high day. It is one of a cluster of three great festivals: Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity. As a major festival, Pentecost takes precedence over all other sacred or secular events on the calendar.

It is a high day in the church's life because:

1. Pentecost is the anniversary of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples.
2. Pentecost marks the completion of Christ's redemptive work and the fulfillment of his promise to send the Spirit.
3. On Pentecost the church celebrates her birthday.
4. It is a traditional day for the reception of new members, particularly youth, by baptism or confirmation.
5. Holy Communion may be celebrated on this festival day.
6. Pentecost initiates the second half of the church year. The first half began with Advent and closed with Ascension. Pentecost begins the longest season of the church year with as many as twenty-seven Sundays. While the first half of the year observes the life of Christ, the second half deals with the life of the church through the work, gifts, and fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost as a Season

Pentecost is observed both as a festival and as a season. Before the appearance of the unified lectionary in 1970, most Protestants observed Pentecost as a festival only. The season following Pentecost was named Trinity.

Up to the seventh century no provision was made for the period from Pentecost to Advent. The second half of the church year consisted only of a reservoir of common masses, ordinary Sundays without any special significance. In northern Europe, the doctrine of the Trinity became increasingly popular. Sundays after Pentecost began to be known as Sundays after Trinity. However, in 1570, the Roman Church adopted the name, "Sunday after Pentecost." Protestants continued to use "Sunday after Trinity." The eastern church followed the Roman custom. Since the new lectionary, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholics are using the term, "Sunday after Pentecost."

Names of the Day

1. Pentecost is the official name of the day. The word comes from the Greek, "pentekoste," meaning fifty — fifty days after Easter.
2. Whitsunday. This is an English contraction of "White Sunday," so called because candidates for baptism and confirmation wore white robes on this day to symbolize the joy of the occasion and to indicate that they were cleansed by the Spirit.

Observance of Pentecost

The Christian's Pentecost is related to the Jewish Pentecost. The Jews had a Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10; Leviticus 23) seven weeks from the Passover. It marked the giving of the Law and the founding of Israel. In like manner, Christians celebrate Pentecost as the day of receiving the Spirit and the founding of the New Israel.

For the Jews Pentecost was also the Feast of first fruits (Exodus 23:10). It was a harvest festival, a time to give thanks for the harvest. On Pentecost Christians also are grateful for the gift of the Spirit and the gifts brought by the Spirit.

Multitudes of Jews came to Jerusalem from all parts of the world for these feasts. Thus, when the disciples on Pentecost spoke in tongues, Jews from various parts of the world were amazed that they could hear the gospel in their own languages.

On Pentecost a Jewish boy had his Bar Mitzvah at which time he became an adult Jew and assumed full responsibility for obedience to the Law. Likewise, Christian youth are often

confirmed on Pentecost and enter into full membership with the church in terms of adult responsibilities and privileges.

Symbols of Pentecost

The color for the Day of Pentecost is red. It is the color of fire, for the Spirit came in tongues of fire. The fire represents God, "the consuming fire." God the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples. The fire represents, moreover, warm hearts, fiery zeal, dedication, and devotion. Also, red is the color of blood, and represents the blood of the martyrs which is the seed of the church. The color for the Sundays after Pentecost is green, a color of growth. It is during this season that Christians are to grow in the Spirit.

A dove is associated with Pentecost as a symbol of the Spirit. When Jesus was baptized the Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove.

The number seven is identified with Pentecost, because the Spirit brings the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit. In church symbolism, these sevenfold gifts are portrayed as seven lamps, seven doves, seven tongues, and a seven-branch candlestick.

Customs of Pentecost

In the Medieval period it was the custom in some churches to let a disc with a dove painted on it fall from the ceiling upon the congregation below. This symbolized the coming of the Spirit upon the people. Often this was followed by throwing red roses upon the people to symbolize the water of baptism falling on them. In thirteenth century France, white pigeons were released during church services. Some families followed the custom of suspending a dove over their dining tables.

Trumpets were used during the worship services to indicate the Spirit's coming as a rushing, mighty wind as happened on Pentecost.

In England on the day after Pentecost, religious plays were produced and "Whitsunale" was sold. Churches and universities made and sold ale to raise funds for the poor or to repair buildings.

In the northeastern part of America "Pinkster" was celebrated on Pentecost. The word came from the German, "Pfingsten," meaning "spirit." It was an occasion for frolic, fun, and much drinking.

The Mood of Pentecost

1. *Celebration.* Pentecost has the mood of joy because the promise of Jesus to send the Spirit was fulfilled and the gift was received. Thus, the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 banned kneeling and fasting on Pentecost. Pentecost has the joy of new members received and sinners coming to repentance. It is the joy of a birthday party, for it is the birthday of the church.
2. *Gratitude.* Christians are grateful on Pentecost for the Spirit and his sevenfold gifts. The Spirit brings life; he calls, enlightens, and gathers believers into the church. Since the church is the product of the Spirit, Christians are grateful on Pentecost for the church as the mother of their faith.
3. *Hope.* Hope results from the Spirit's making all things new. Pentecost is renewal and revival day in the church. The Spirit is renewed in the faithful. Pentecost is more than an observance of a great event in the past but is a repeatable experience here and now. With the Spirit comes new life and hope.

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return." The ashes came from the burned palms of the previous Palm Sunday. To this day, Roman Catholics on Ash Wednesday receive a smudge of ashes on their foreheads. Protestants dropped the custom because they felt it contradicted the Gospel for Ash Wednesday: "And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen of men." (Matthew 6:16-21)

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday. "Shrove" referred to the shriving or cleansing of their sins by going to confession on this day. On the other hand, it was a day of feasting and for carnival. The French called it "Mardi Gras." The Germans had "Fasching" or "Fasch Nacht." It was a time to use up their store of fat which was forbidden during Lent. Thus, many Germans used up the fat by making doughnuts on Shrove Tuesday, and the English specialized in pancakes.

The Past Observance of Lent

In past centuries Lent was strictly observed and was a very meaningful season of the church year.

1. It was a time of preparation. Originally, Lent was the six-week period to prepare candidates for baptism at Easter. During this period of examination, instruction, penitence, and prayer, the candidates proved their worthiness for the sacrament of baptism. When Christianity was legalized in 325, Lent became a period of preparation for the entire people of God.

2. In the past, Lent was a period of penitence. It was a time for mourning, solemnity, and sadness. A hymn for Holy Week says, "to come and mourn with me awhile." The mood is expressed in the penitential color, violet, for this season, the same color as Advent. To remind the faithful of the nature of the season, a violet veil was hung between the nave and the chancel. Often the altar cross was veiled in violet as a reminder of the penitential character of the season. In keeping with this somber mood, the "Alleluia" and the "Gloria in Excelsis" were omitted from the liturgy. Weddings during Lent were forbidden. Organs were stopped. Public entertainment was outlawed. Often royalty during Lent dressed in black. Lent was a time to be sorry for one's sins. It was also a time for the re-living of the sufferings of Christ. When one's Savior is on his way to death in your behalf, it is most unseemly to be frivolous and gay.

3. Fasting as a means of spiritual discipline was a part of past Lenten observance. From the time of the Apostles, Friday, the day of Jesus' death, was a day of fasting. During Holy Week, Good Friday and Holy Saturday were days of fasting. In the fourth century, fasting was extended to the entire period of Lent.

Fasting was taken seriously. There was abstinence from meat, dairy products, and eggs for the period of Lent. Fasting meant only one meal per day and the rest of the day one existed on water. In the Middle Ages the fast was relaxed to the extent that lunch was permitted. At the time of the Reformation, many Protestants dropped fasting as being "Popish." Some Protestants like John Wesley practiced fasting as a discipline, but if it were practiced, it was on a voluntary basis. For most Protestants, fasting was more of a token than a real denial of food.

The purpose of fasting was twofold. It was for personal discipline and for participation in the sufferings of Christ who in this season was on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die. The second purpose of fasting was to render some service through fasting. There was a positive side to fasting; it was not only for personal benefit. Pope Leo I in 460 said, "What we forego by fasting is to be given as alms to the poor."

4. Lent was a time for special prayer. During Lent, devout Christians were concerned about the development of their spiritual lives. They gave extra time and effort to personal and public prayer. The traditional symbol for Lenten prayer is the pretzel. In Lent, Christians made dough of flour, salt, and water. They shaped the dough in the form of two crossed arms to remind themselves to pray. The bread was called "little arms" — "bracellae," later called "Brezel" or "Pretzel." Apparently it was an ancient practice, for there is a picture of a pretzel in a fifth century manuscript. Pretzels were a Lenten food and thus only eaten during the period as a reminder to pray more often.